The Better Country

by

DALLAS LORE SHARP

The odyssey of a discontented professor whose search for the 'better country' took him to the Pacific and back again, a wiser and happier man, to the Hills of Hingham.

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THE BETTER COUNTRY

By Dallas Lore Sharp

CAUGHT in the rut of life and his ways falling into a monotony of routine, the Professor tucks his wife in the car, turns a deaf ear to the protests of the grown-up and gone-away children, and starts out to search for a new occupation and a better country.

This book is the story of that search — humorous, philosophical, descriptive, entertaining, moving. It is a real philosophy of life, done with rare charm, insight, and understanding — and with the fine touch of wit and humor so characteristic of the author. It is a book of travel, a book of adventure, a book of philosophy, and a book of delightful reading.

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By Dallas Lore Sharp

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HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
BOSTON AND NEW YORK

THE BETTER COUNTRY

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By DALLAS LORE SHARP

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
The Riverside Press Cambridge
1928

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The Riverside Press
CAMBRIDGE · MASSACHUSETTS
PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

TO

ABRAHAM AND SARAH

AND THE

EAGER MIDDLE-FIFTIES

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THE BETTER COUNTRY

THE BETTER COUNTRY

CHAPTER I

PROLOGUE

So we quit Hingham.

Of course there are antecedent matters. Nothing ever begins where it seems to start. Just so this going to Santa Barbara did not end with our stopping there. All conclusions are literary, not real.

It is not easy to get out of Hingham, nor out of your old classroom, nor out of your older frame of mind. We had lived in Hingham a long time. We liked everybody in Hingham, or nearly everybody. Mullein Hill we loved. Yet we wondered if, possibly, there might not be a better country.

For all of this time I had been teaching at the University. I liked the undergraduates — most of them. I even enjoyed reading some of their required themes. But I had wondered secretly if I might not find a better occupation, possibly, than reading required freshman themes.

Meantime Daphne had been keeping house, and bringing up boys in the house, as I had been bringing up — girls chiefly at the University. Daphne liked housekeeping with reservations. She loved her sons without reservations, but not without discriminations. She had seen them grow up and go away from home, and have such exciting times

away from home that she naturally wondered whether she might not have a more exciting time if she went away from home. She deserved a more exciting time.

Thus we speculated, a dangerous indulgence for persons in their middle fifties, such long, long thoughts being the prerogative of youth. We entertained no illusions as to our youth, not when the children came home. We knew exactly where we stood in regard to all things current in modes and manners, especially current college and young-men manners. Nevertheless, such were the thoughts of our heads, in Scriptural phrase, of Daphne's head no less than mine, and of her head, I suspect, more often than mine.

This doubtless means that we were not resigned to being upwards of fifty, nor resigned to the present generation, nor to the universe generally. It may seem to mean that we were not resigned to each other any longer, and to the thought of dying in Hingham. Nothing could be farther from my mind. And as for Daphne, I maintain that she had little to complain of in me, and still less for the way Time had used her. There wasn't a woman in Hingham who could turn a warmer cheek to Fifty-Five than Daphne.

She didn't complain; she forever conspired, after the nature of women. I knew something would happen, for happenings attend on Daphne as the swarm attends on the queen bee. She must needs be starting something; and here it was; and I was not exactly prepared for it. But no man can be prepared for any woman.

What the crisis was, or how my resignation from the faculty came about, I can scarcely tell, except that the children were all away, the younger two far away in a

desert school near Death Valley in California. We had been having children in one stage or another now for two decades, and were very much enured to them. The sudden difference inside of the empty house was rather terrible even for me. Daphne faltered at it, the first weakness of any sort that I had ever discovered in her defiant constitution. I would come upon her mending and darning and weeping without a sound, the unattended tears sliding softly down upon the stocking and fulling the spot over which her deft fingers were weaving a little miracle of warp and woof. When a woman does that for the first time since her pinafore days, you may know that something is going to happen.

So with me at the University. Only I never wept over the students who went away. They never all went away and stayed. Instead they came back — more than went away. The names of some seven hundred of them were on my roll book for the last semester. They went; but more and ever more they came. I couldn't see the end of them. When a man has been teaching the same thing to the same freshmen for twenty-three years without a sabbatic break, it is time for something to happen to him for the good of the perennial freshmen.

But it was not for the good of the freshmen that I resigned. They are too redundant, untoward, and arrant. No one can do anything for the good of college freshmen. If my resignation eventuated as good to them, and I am sure it did, then that is well. The real cause of my action is possibly clearer to Daphne than to me. But we had long been bent on doing something different, on going somewhere else — west, probably, and if not growing up with

the new country, to find it at least a better country. Besides I had a pain in my right leg.

It happened very suddenly, and on the very day, speaking allegorically, that Daphne and I found ourselves at the top of the long hill up which for so many years we had been climbing. We had never been at the top before. If fifty plus is late to arrive, it must be confessed that we had not always driven a car. On the crest of the hill, and running with it at right angles to the main road that we were traveling, ran an old trail, unimproved, unposted, and utterly untraveled.

We had come up on the main road, of course, and everybody was coming up along with us, and going on over and down. This road was well posted, though for no good reason, as nothing passable crossed it, or diverged from it, or had, indeed, though we had kept a sharp lookout, ever since our start upon it thirty years before.

As we topped the hill Daphne called my attention to a guide-post with index finger pointing ahead — To Pension Place. I had heard of Pension Place before, yet this was the first time I had come to the name along the road. Daphne turned to her route-book, being much addicted to the volume. '"Pension Place,"' she read, '"at the bottom of the grade. Cemetery beyond. End of road,"' adding, half to herself, as she raised her eyes from the book, 'I don't like the sound of it. Won't there ever be so much as a left-hand or a right-hand turn?'

This hill had been a rather steep and steady climb. We had often wondered what we should see on the other side. And now neither of us exactly favored the prospect — a rather easy descent, without bumps, but also without

turns or forks or stops to look forward to until we came to Pension Place and the Cemetery and the end of the road.

'What do you say?' I asked; 'shall we turn back?'

'We can't, you know; this is a one-way street,' she reminded me.

'No, we can't go back, I suppose.'

'But we can go off,' she murmured, more to herself than to me, the words a mere breath as she examined the cross-trail along the crest of the hill. Daphne's mind is peculiar. She says it is a man's part to initiate things.

'Let's go off on this cross-road,' I proposed, 'We've dreamed of doing something like this détouring for years and years.'

But Daphne only sighed, and looking ahead down the broad descent before us, said, 'Here's the chance for a restful coast at last,' dropping her folded hands into the open route-book.

'We can't coast a hill as long as that, Daphne. We'll burn out our brakes,' I told her.

'But we shan't need brakes any more once we reach the bottom,' she replied. Then, turning again to her open book, she asked:

'Where do you suppose that this strange trail would take us? I don't see it on the map. But somebody has recently been over it — in a wagon. Could we travel such a road as that in a motor car?'

'We could in this car!' I cried, the purr of the idling engine like the pawing of Pegasus in my eager ear.

Daphne drew another sigh and went on, 'But can you train it not to hit the bumps? This wild trail looks all bumps.'

Pulling aside out of traffic we gazed along the trend of the hills in the direction of the strange road, quite sure that we saw mountains on the sky. It was doubtless a mirage, but I was certain that I saw the prairies, the gray deserts, and green-gold orchards against a softly heaving sea.

But Daphne had turned and was looking back, down the hill up which for so long we had been chugging. And it was a pleasant scene which she beheld: the fine old city of Boston, the college at its heart, and just beyond the city the low, sweet hills of Hingham. We had never been able to look back over so much of life before.

We saw people on the road below us, multitudes of them, all students of mine, or so they seemed. I knew them to be a useful, lively, forgiving host. Two of our own sons were among them. But two of the sons, the younger two, were not there. They were far west. And Daphne's eyes came swiftly back to the cross-trail and ran with it westward, past the Great Divide into the deserts of the Sierras.

'Are you too old to teach?' she broke in abruptly.

'Yes, I am,' I vowed, even more abruptly. 'But that is not all: this is the end of my twenty . . .'

'I know,' she interrupted. 'But what a teacher you were to begin with! And you are not . . .'

'"Not a bit better to end with," you're going to say.'

'You're quite mistaken this time,' she smiled, 'for I think you are not nearly so bad a teacher now. And isn't it a pity to quit just when you are at your best?'

'Tell me, Daphne, when is a teacher at his best? You've taught.'

'Well,' she began, 'you have had twenty-odd years of consecutive experience. You know a great deal more than . . .'

'Than I need to know, Daphne. And I have altogether too much experience. What I lack is faith. Teaching is as much believing as knowing. It is not a battle for grades, but for souls. A teacher needs freshness more than facts; more love and faith than experience. I'm just too old to learn. The students are just too young to teach. The time is ripe for me to begin at something new.'

She gave me a sad, patient look, and — 'shifted gears,' saying, with apparent indifference, 'Do you think there are gasoline stations along this ridge road?'

'You mean, Daphne' — and I measured my words carefully — 'you mean, have I the nerve to quit my profession? Have I the courage to try something different? And — can I pay for the oil and gas?'

'Yes, something like that, I suppose; only that is figurative, and we are dealing with really terrible actualities. Is it sensible now for two old fifties like ourselves to drop our profession and salary, forget all we know, and begin all over again while the four boys are still in college?'

I should have jammed on the emergency at that, only I was going too strong.

'What better place could we leave them in than in college? It's theirs to get out. This is our last chance,' I sped on. 'We'll never be in our fifties as early as this again. I like teaching, but haven't I an important book to write, or something? Hingham is a good place to live in, but we haven't tried every other place, and how do we know that there isn't a better country?'

'But we don't know where this trail is taking us!' she moaned with less fear than excitement, as the car nosed off up the narrow, untraveled road.

'And why do we need to know?' I answered her, occupied instantly with my driving. 'It certainly can't take us to a worse country than that at the bottom of the hill — that Pension Place, and the Cemetery, and the End of the Road!'

'Anyhow,' I heard her murmur below her breath, 'we are heading West at last! And we *are* climbing again.'

> And stepping westward seemed to be
> A kind of heavenly destiny.

CHAPTER II

THE CASTLE IN CALIFORNIA

THAT story, of course, is in the nature of an allegory — the hill, I mean, the cross-trail, and our talk; just a figurative way of saying that the minute we were free from being managed by the children, we took matters into our own hands again, and I resigned my professorship, seized the means of escape nearest at hand, and started on a second honeymoon and a new adventure in the world. Of course we were stepping westward figuratively, but also very literally in the automobile from Hingham to Santa Barbara, and except for the weather, there was much about it that seemed like destiny and most heavenly.

Take this letter, for instance, from our dear Astrid in Paris. If it sounds improbable and after the manner of the Prologue, I will have a photo-print made of it for an appendix. From this moment on Daphne is with me, and I am restricted to the actual and the true. I quote from Astrid's letter — her joy after years of urging:

> You're really leaving for Santa Barbara? Perfect! I am at peace. Now my lovely Casa Loma shall once more have a soul. It is yours — forever, the big bungalow to live in; the little one, Casita, sweet Casita, where I intended to write, alas! your very own to write in — your great book — and mine!
>
> The gardener will have houses and grounds ready for you. But I — if only I could fly ahead to welcome you! But my darling Cecil Brunners and the great live-oaks will welcome you. And my baby eucalyptus trees which I planted with my own hands at the ends of the walks — go straight to them with my love and tell me how tall they are and if they remember me!

I think from over here that God built Santa Barbara. I helped Him build Casa Loma in which you two shall live, but which I shall never see again!

Dear dreamer of dreams, how could we know on this side of the sea that the dark fear was more than the shadow of a passing cloud? We all build houses, Astrid, even with the help of God, that we cannot live in, but must turn over to others, though none can dwell in our houses long. It is five years since you left Casa Loma, a heavy time for little saplings.

All of these five years the dear mistress of Casa Loma had kept her lovely home ready for us, the big house for us to live in, the little house, Casita, for me to write in. She had kept the gardener in his lodge by the gate, the roses in their hedges, the three walks belting Casa Loma hill beneath the ancient live-oaks free for musing and meditation. Behind the hill, far below in the plain, lay a portion of Santa Barbara. In front, and close at hand, billowed the brown hills of Hope Ranch up against the chaparral-green flanks of the Santa Ynez peaks. Westward through a dip in the mesa the sun goes down to the cradling sea. All of this Astrid was giving us to dwell and dream in, and to write in, forever and a day.

Things like this never happen except in books? Oh, yes, they do, now and then, quite outside of books, in the humdrum world of Hingham and Boston, and wherever you find Astrid and Daphne, dreamer and doer of romance respectively. But people nowadays are not given castles in Spain! To be sure they are, castles in California, too, and everywhere.

I can scarce believe the tale
Borne to me on every gale!

You have been to Carcassonne?
Looked its stately towers upon?

Certainly I have, if you mean what I mean by Carcassonne. At least I have been to Santa Barbara. I am sure the peaks of the Santa Ynez Range are as stately towers as Carcassonne's. And no walled city in all of the world can be lovelier than the oak-walled hill that is crowned by Casa Loma.

Carcassonne is not a myth —
Not a name to conjure with?
Figment of a poet's brain,
Child of his own joy and pain?

No, it is a real place along the coast of California looking away to the Channel Islands, far at sea.

Do men live in Carcassonne —
Love and labor, strive and die,
Pray vain prayers for bliss unwon,
Lift pale faces to the sky?
In its streets do children play,
Laughing, shouting, all the day?

That they certainly do in Hingham and Boston; but in Santa Barbara — Daphne and I were going to find no pale faces in Santa Barbara, no vain prayers, for there are only children in Santa Barbara, laughing, shouting, all the day. Anyhow, once out there, away from the Hingham winter and sciatic nerves and knees, I would write my great book.

Astrid thought I could. Daphne, dear thing, never talked about my great book, but was always for finishing the one that had been so long started. Daphne is not the dreamer that Astrid is, but a rather tremendous doer. Besides, I have lived with Daphne for thirty years, and that

makes a difference in her dreams. It makes a difference, too, how many children you bear and bring up. Astrid never had a child. Daphne has had five, and brought four of them up. That takes a great deal out of a woman; but it puts an amazing amount back in. There is nothing she is afraid of after that; and instead of dreaming she lays swift and violent hold on adventuring.

The poet who sang,

> As the spent radiance
> Of the winter sun,
> So is a woman
> With her travail done,
>
> Her brood gone from her,
> And her thoughts as still
> As the waters
> Under a ruined mill —

had not passed the best part of his lifetime with Daphne. Her thoughts are not still. They never have been still, and, her brood gone from her, these thoughts are livelier than ever. We are neither of us so lively on our legs as formerly, signs of ruin in the mills (an apt figure for parents). But we believed we could leave our legs behind us in Hingham for the winter, if only we went away by motor and went far enough away.

So we started for California, about as far away as you can go in the winter by motor. We escaped from Hingham. What we did not do was to take enough extra heavy underclothes with us to California. I cannot say that we altogether escaped the winter, for we barely got over the Mohawk Trail ahead of it. We wrestled with it all through western Iowa and straight on into Arizona. It was awful

at Flagstaff. But when we came to California, they had stoves outdoors! As if they were trying to heat the universe! There seemed to be more stoves about the California landscape than trees. And I was undone. We had been through more than one coal shortage in Hingham; we had fought with the winter all the way across; but through it all we never had had to heat more than the inside of a house, or only a room or two. Here all outdoors! As if here were the last hearth fire on the crust of the globe which at all hazards must be kept smudging or the habitable earth would congeal.

Still California was a change, though we did not outrun our legs. They had chased us about too long for that. It might make a difference which route you take. From McPherson, Kansas, on we followed the Santa Fe Trail, and arrived in California very much the same persons we were on leaving Hingham.

Daphne is a more permanent person than I am. Her birthday is in January, a bleaker month than mine, and she has seen fifty and upwards of them; but she makes utter shame of the stanza,

> As the spent radiance
> Of the winter sun.

I tell her she looks not one shade less colorful than on that radiant day in August among the pines of the Kennebec, so many years, so short a time, ago! But she is not to be swept off her feet any more by me, she says. Constitutionally and intellectually inimical to time, she only half knows that we can't start on a second honeymoon as late as this, even to California, and do it on wings, as we did our first one from Maine to Massachusetts.

'But now we have a motor,' she smiles. 'That's surer than wings.'

Maybe so. There were moments along the route when we should have felt safer with wings. Yet, given the chance of flying over life or running amuck through it, escaping it or realizing it, most of us, though over fifty, will seize upon the realization. Whatever we looked like, I am sure neither of us felt like ruined mills; and Daphne didn't look like one. She had no feelings. She despised them, in herself, and especially in me. I have never had any pleasure complaining to Daphne; and there is little consolation in complaining to one's self. Daphne was bent on the desert and her boys.

> There is no striving
> To cross his intent;
> There is no contriving
> His plots to prevent —

runs an old song of the lover, which is a great deal truer of the mother. Daphne plays the part of lover reasonably well with some prompting from me. It is in the rôle of mother that she is the leading lady. Strivings nor contrivings avail against her when her plots are motherward. She had three definite routes mapped out to California, and all three of them took in Deep Springs Valley and the boys.

Yet they went straight on to Santa Barbara. Daphne had no maternal intentions toward her children other than to look in upon them. If this remote desert were a good place for the boys, her presence there would not improve it. If it were bad — mothers tend to make things worse for sons. She had sent them out with their shields and very

plain instructions. They were not to come home until the three-year term was up if they could manage to stay.

That is a long time for — a mother. And they had actually arrived, I think, when Daphne had the route traced in red on the map, with two alternate routes in blue, in the event of a mountain slide, an earthquake, or any other little thing making a détour necessary. Daphne has a hyper-consciousness of space. She 'thinks' California as if it were Cohasset, the next town to Hingham, toward the Cape.

'Whatever exists, exists necessarily in space; otherwise it would be nowhere and consequently not at all,' is sound enough metaphysics. But the difference to the chauffeur is immeasurable whether or not his passenger's space conceiver comes equipped with an odometer and registers miles. Daphne's is not so equipped.

But it is time to be off. I was in the kitchen that morning starting breakfast when Daphne came down as usual with a flower in her hair, but with something extra about her — not a party dress exactly, but the one she often wore to Boston. She was always a bit festive in the morning, like the sunrise; but now, though I couldn't put my finger on it, she wore a touch of evening besides.

'A weather breeder,' I said to myself, knowing that something was going to happen before night; and I stepped around a trifle livelier than the gray dawn finds me wont to do, putting on the quick oats and the spider and slicing the bacon. It is not quite fair for a woman to appear even in her own kitchen looking like that, and I came mighty near dropping two onion-pattern plates trying to kiss her. If I had dropped them and smashed them, I wonder — if

we had ever got to Santa Barbara? A man who cannot be trusted with two warm breakfast plates and a pretty face in a kitchen is no man to drive transcontinentally with any face from Boston to Santa Barbara.

'Going somewhere?' I inquired casually, turning the sizzling bacon. She nodded. 'To Boston?' I asked, knowing I had to go to Manchester, New Hampshire.

'Don't burn the bacon, please. Yes, to Boston; and I think we'll just go on to California. The paper last evening said we were going to have good weather to-day.'

CHAPTER III

THE OUTFIT

'We ought to make an early start,' Daphne went on. 'The days are growing very short now. I suppose the car is ready?'

'For California?'

'Yes, California and the children.'

'They're something of a trip!' I gasped.

'But you've *got* to go to Manchester, New Hampshire. What's the difference to California except just keeping on?'

That's an innocent-looking question. Any man should have I.Q. enough to answer it, if only he could summon his I.Q. in time. As usual I was speechless for a period. I have honestly tried to think Daphne's thoughts after her; tried to find the chapter in my college logic out of which she gets her reasoning; tried with all my might, for all of these thirty years, to get used to her. But can any man get used to any woman? The self-evident, axiomatic, feminine face on this sort of question will always be my undoing.

'I suppose the car is ready,' she repeated with a certain finality which called for no reply.

'I'll go to the barn and ask her, Daphne.'

'"Ask her!" I wish you wouldn't speak in that familiar way about the car,' she said, looking at me as a believing woman will sometimes at the man she wants to trust. 'I hate to hear you call it "she." The implications do not become you.'

'Implications! What are you driving at, Daphne?

Everybody calls his car "she." There isn't a masculine line or habit about that machine. The harder you drive her, the better she runs. And no matter what I say or do to her, she won't know when we start out whether it's for New Hampshire or Calif . . .'

Daphne laid a finger on my lips, an old trick of hers for getting into the conversation.

'Now, if you have anything to say to your lady car, hurry about it. We haven't a minute to spare. Listen!' she commanded, getting between me and the kitchen door. 'Don't breathe California to the car. Don't mention it again this morning to yourself. Don't go out to the barn now and try to pump gasoline enough into the tank to run you all the way to Santa Barbara. And don't try to feel before you start how exhausted you are going to be when you arrive. Just stop your feelings at Manchester, New Hampshire.'

I backed off and gazed at her. The mother of five children! A small woman with snow-white hair and fifty-five birthdays, level gray eyes, a cheek that had never been in need of artificial courage, and a mouth that *had* to be kissed. So I did it now, smothering, not stopping, the banter; for when she had caught her breath again she added,

'As for me, I'm starting for California, and getting the whole thrill of it! Now do hurry; and come in at once!'

Hurry? She had moved from before the kitchen door, but I was incapable of any locomotion toward California.

'I should have told you,' she said, going about her work, 'that I have attended to everything. I have written the children that their train gets in at seven-forty the morning of December 23; that we will meet them at the station in

Los Angeles; that we will drive on up that day to Santa Barbara; spend the next day getting ready — and the next day is Christmas!'

If not everything, she certainly had attended to nearly everything. I found my way to the barn, and stood, I don't know how long, staring at the car which was ready to meet the seven-forty train from the desert in Los Angeles the morning of December 23. 'Aura Vincit!' roared the pawing lion on the front of the hood. 'Air Conquers!' Daphne's doctrine, too! But this would be a far-flung victory — from Hingham Harbor to the beach at Santa Barbara — and on mighty little air except the lion's!

Something different and special ought certainly to be done to a car that was about to start across the continent for California, but I could not think what it was that ought to be done, so I put in a steel snow shovel, an axe, a tow-rope, tire chains, and four bushels of Baldwin apples. Except for Daphne I was ready to leave for The Better Country.

To be sure, there are a great many miles and a great many turns on the road to any place so far away. And there is much putting to rights of things in Hingham. What is the style of car that can carry a man and all of his possessions out of Hingham?

We had thirty-five acres, more or less; we had the house and barn, the dog and cat, and several stands of bees. The horse, cow, pigs, chickens, and mowing machine we parted with when the children went away. But what we still had left, which might be carried with us to The Better Country, could be conceived of only in terms of five-ton trucks.

I returned to the house.

'Don't take it so hard,' Daphne said, my countenance evidently betraying inward confusion. 'You'll wish the trip were twice as far by the time we arrive,' her voice a bit wistful, the slightest shadow of disappointment clouding her smiling eyes.

How pink and pretty she looked! What courage and common sense lay behind her fresh and thoughtful face! She had always played this part with me in our little drama, ready before me every time to start for The Better Country.

'Daphne,' I vowed, never so much of a Daniel as in her disappointment, 'with you looking like that, there isn't a man alive but would wish the Pacific Ocean were paved with concrete so he could keep on going with you right into Siberia.'

'Hawaii, if you don't mind. I had much rather have some nice man drive with me to Honolulu than to any place I can think of in Siberia.' And, pouring my coffee, she continued, 'But our first stop, remember, is Los Angeles.'

'For Christmas with the boys,' I commented, under my breath, not thinking she would hear me.

'That's it! You're beginning to comprehend!' And the shock to her so joggled the coffee-pot in her hand that the unsoldered lid fell off and might have broken the china cup on the table.

'Do people hang up their stockings in a tropical country like California, Daphne?'

'Of course they do, silly! And we are going to hang ours up, too. And what's more, we're going to have a real Christmas tree, a little piñon pine for a change, or else one of those weazened, elfin cedars of the desert which you like so much. We'll cut it on the way out, in some Rocky

Mountain meadow, or else on a mesa down in Arizona. Won't the children love to see it tipped with a star and feathery white with snow! And when they're in bed I'm planning to read outside their room,

'Twas the night before Christmas —

just as I always used to do here at home before they went away.'

She finished her toast in silence; folded her napkin into a triangle in order to tell it from mine, folded square; got into her kitchen apron, and set about her chores. She would do up the morning dishes if the world were coming to an end at noon.

I liked the idea of a piñon pine for a Christmas tree. That's what I had put the axe in the car for, evidently. I put in several other things later; and Daphne forgot to put in several things — her entire mending outfit, for one thing — yarns, threads, pins, needles, buttons, thimbles, patching pieces, bodkins, and her round-headed stocking-darner! She tried to blame me for leaving it all on a chair in the dining-room; but the blame wouldn't stick to me. No jury in the world would charge such a feminine mess as that to the conscience of any man. It simply means to me that, in spite of her outward calm, Daphne was laboring under considerable excitement. It was as if I had started to motor to California and gone off without the car. For these particular things are Daphne's Rock in a Weary Land. The figure is not apt. I meant to say that they were not mere tools, not like the kit in, say, a plumber's bag; but like relics, rather, in a pardoner's wallet,

Bret-ful of pardon come from Rome al hoot.

Daphne blessed us all with them, but mostly blessed herself. They had to do not only with her meditations, but even with her prayers. Instead of telling her beads, Daphne darned, telling the holes in socks and union suits. Not that darning was her religion, but only a form of worship. Rents and tears and holes were her escape, open doors through which she slipped away with her soul. Every stout idea, every honest conviction, and every stubborn position that she held she seemed to arrive at while darning. Her thinking was a sort of irruption from her round-headed stocking-darner. And for her to forget this paraphernalia of her inward life showed more excitement than she wanted me to see. It was as if a priest had forgotten his prayer-book or a medium her cabinet, her shadows, and her prehensile toes.

We got away, and we left the house very well picked up too. At the Five-and-Ten we bought a new batch of darning gear, except the rolls of mending patches and the round-headed darner. That unique implement is not to be bought at any Five-and-Ten; nor is it to be grown on any gourd vine such as bore my family's stocking-darners for mothers and daughters without number. This wooden one of Daphne's is the only one of its kind. There is no image nor likeness of it, so far as I know, in all of the darned world. It has been passed down a long domestic line, and is so needle-pricked that, not only does it seem sentient at last, but its hitherto bald head has begun to sprout fuzzy, fiber hair.

Our load, in spite of a few things overlooked and forgotten, was not ill-assorted, nor excessive, though rather long, apparently, on apples. Let me say that one bushel

(and the cat and dog) were for the boy at Harvard; two bushels were for the boy at the Agricultural College at Amherst; the fourth bushel was to comfort us, me especially, on the journey, and to help decorate the Christmas tree in Santa Barbara. I didn't want the Western boys to forget the flavor of Hingham apples, either.

The car was innocent of tent and cooking utensils. I was lecturing all the way to Topeka. Besides, it was the middle of November and there was a considerable distance to go. There were voices, too, in the pines that morning, a stirring of chill, invisible shapes about Mullein Hill, not favorable to thoughts of tents and camp-fires smouldering under the winter stars. At the very best we could but steal a march on the weather. A gray sky bent close over us, and we had not crossed Hoosac Mountain before we heard the hounds of winter baying on our trail.

CHAPTER IV

THE OPEN ROAD

DAPHNE fluttered into place beside me at the wheel and cuddled down like a robin into her nest. The journey she had been brooding for many a year was beginning to hatch.

'Isn't it sweet!' she warbled softly, settling closer upon the nestling trip. We were descending Mullein Hill. 'Isn't it just fun at last to be on the road to . . .'

'To The Better Country, Daphne.'

'To Santa Barbara and the boys, I was going to say,' she concluded.

The car dropped down to the street, swung about the rural postbox, the gears gathered firmly into 'high,' and we were off. I had left the mouth of the postbox partly open, or it had been blown open, and it stood there like one dead, its eyeless countenance staring after us so reproachfully that I could have turned back and taken the forsaken thing along with us in the car. There it must stand at the entrance all winter, empty and unvisited. How forlorn! And this was such a gloomy day! I am particularly sensitive to a leaden sky, a raw, whining wind, and the threat of snow.

We came out upon the main road. Daphne spread a brooding wing and feathered my hand at the throttle, cooing inwardly some nesting song, as if it were spring and not autumn, the summer of our mating and not the winter of our migration, and another turn, perhaps a desperate one, in our long, long search for The Better Country.

'What perfect weather for our start!' she exclaimed. 'It's as good as California already!'—giving my hand a mothering touch, no sentimental postbox, no leafless elms, no gray stone walls, no empty house, no leaden skies within the offing of her consciousness. Her consciousness was all of California. And so was her countenance. I had never seen her face more warmly lighted, nor in her eyes more of their disquieting depth and distance.

For eyes like Daphne's will often leave a man guessing. There was that in them now which filled me with wonder. What between Hingham and Santa Barbara were they seeing? Not what mine were seeing, I was sure. I am a more experienced driver than Daphne. She has never driven a single mile. I have the livelier imagination; but perhaps she has the longer, steadier look. I was sure it was going to snow; but what of it? she said; didn't we bring a shovel? I could smell iodine, carbolic acid, and bandages in the fallen roadside leaves, and hear the wind moaning like an accident ward in a hospital; nothing of which was even possible for her. I didn't know which railroad crossing it would be, or which mountain pass (I particularly dreaded mountain passes); but there was one thing I did know: that I was the chief mourner at my obsequies, Daphne never entertaining her own or anybody's funeral.

We sped along toward Boston. I was much depressed. To begin with, I don't dislike to travel, though I do hate to leave home. You cannot lightly close a house in which you have lived so long, probably — never to open its doors again! It was desertion, and just like leaving Daphne. There wasn't a stick in the wood-basket! And for a fire on the hearth, nothing but ashes! The connections with the

outside world were all broken, the windows fastened, the doors bolted, and only ghosts to sit before the rusting andirons. Not until I am a snail and carry my house with me upon my back shall I become a willing traveler.

Not so with Daphne. We had hardly crossed the Hingham line before I saw that she was already in her Santa Barbara garden cutting poinsettias from her poinsettia trees for the Christmas table, and breathing the breath of eternal brides under her oranges; the dark green trees in golden fruit, I hoped, but starry with blossoms for her, blossoms that on her wedding day she did not wear. Dear thing, she wore wild wintergreen blossoms which she gathered herself in the pine woods the morning of that day along the Kennebec.

But she should have orange blossoms now to wear — every day! I should gather them for her fresh each morning, and snare them myself in her lovely hair. So she was dreaming as we crossed the Hingham line. We had entered Hingham dreaming years ago, as we all must if anything is to come true. And it speaks well for Hingham that Daphne now could find exit through an ivory postern under the dull November lift into four thousand miles of landscape that was numb with cold and coming snow.

I said Daphne was not a dreamer; and that is right. If she were already walking in her California garden, it was because she had *thought* herself there. I like to stalk an idea, play about it, get all the fun and fear out of it. I'm the dreamer. Daphne takes hold of ideas as she does of hot boiled beets, to skin them. One quick squeeze, and *plop!* from crown to tail they're finished. So instant is Daphne in action that while I am starting for California she has already arrived.

All the way to Boston I kept half wishing that something would happen to the car: that all four of the tires might blow out together, or something ominous occur. But Daphne wouldn't know an omen if she saw one. Her only superstition is the Government weather report. The signs, I was sure, were all against us, but no events. The four tires did not blow out. They conspired to carry us on, the four resilient things as pumped up for The Better Country as Daphne herself: forty pounds of pressure in each of them, while in Daphne — I had no gauge to measure the pounds pressure of her westward purpose.

She was elate. At first I thought her mind toward travel unusual, if not a bit abnormal. That, however, was a mistake. I did not meet a woman on the entire trip, married or single, to whom I dared talk of our journey in the vicinity of the car. She would climb right in among the dunnage, or, if I would let her, she would *drive* the car. On the other hand, we didn't discover a man, single or married, who would listen to my glowing story with anything but ill-concealed contempt, or with open wrath. This seems to mark the male of the species, not the female, for the domestic part. So it is with sticklebacks and toadfish and certain birds like the northern phalarope.

We had to escape from one of our hostesses, fading away on the edge of dawn without our breakfast. We simply couldn't take her with us. The car was full of things, and she was terribly portly. What a mess she would have made among the luggage! But we looked so picnicky, she declared, and so toury! I know we did; and after that, when visiting female friends, I first hid the car in a public garage.

Every woman took the sedan on sight for a transcon-

tinental bus. The empty back seat, the extra fur robe, the westward course of the machine was too much for them. But I had Daphne, and I didn't need any other woman passenger.

This portly person was not easily put off. I told Daphne that perhaps we had better take her, at least for a distance, rather than have a scene. But Daphne said there would be no scene, or else there would be *two* scenes. Then I knew that I must act. The situation called for a man. So I got Daphne out of that house and into the car before the prying stars were sent about their business. We both went unwashed. I pushed the car by hand down to the street so as not to disturb the lady's slumbers, and turned on the power only when we were sure of beating everybody out of that town.

No, Daphne is perfectly normal. That is almost her only failing. Nothing would happen between Hingham and Boston; nothing between Boston and Santa Barbara. Nothing untoward could happen with Daphne along; at least nothing ever had. But the journey wasn't over yet. We had not found The Better Country. Whatever remained of the thousands of miles, however, seemed little to do now that we had actually disposed of the thousands of things on Mullein Hill, locked the doors, and with Tan, the cat, and Jersey, the dog, were almost to Boston.

Looking back on the experience, I'm glad we did it when we did, and by motor as we did, instead of by train. Daphne was often wishing we had taken the other road; but all of the way I knew we had the right mode of travel, and that I had the right car and the right passenger. After it is all over, who ever did, indeed, wish he had taken some

other trip, or been some other person on the trip, whether he went as prince or pauper? Daphne has tried to work me over, but has never tried to swap me. Nor I her. We differ in respect to enough roads and things to make any trip interesting. And one thing we are perfectly agreed on: that everybody in Hingham and, say, Cambridge, Massachusetts, ought to go West at least once, and go by motor.

You are close to the earth and the people by motor, an intimate immediate mode of travel, slow or fast to your mood, or the mood of the weather, yet gradual enough, no matter how fast you go, to impress you with the considerable width and variety of the country, and the extraordinary length of some of the roads. It is a gradual transition from the pine to the palm, or even the sequoia; though no one in the East, however gradually he comes upon them, can accustom himself to these particular trees.

For business the sleeping-car in this country is a necessity; but for real travel it is too utterly violent, the spark of consciousness jumping a five hundred-mile-gap of landscape in a single night. You are nearer done traveling by five hundred miles, if that is the end of travel; you are five hundred miles nearer California. But what about Kansas and Arizona?

Every mile by motor is a continuous experience. There are no lapses between twilight and dawn. On the train I have closed my eyes in the early dusk of a winter day to a howling prairie blizzard and opened them the next morning to see cattle picking a desert breakfast from among the soapweeds and prickly pears and dusty sagebrush, climatic zones and geologic æons apart, a break with the earth so shattering that it can never be mended, at least for that

journey and for that sequence of experience in space and time. It was an end of the road. The bridge of continuity went out in that night. Morning found me still going, but no longer on a road whose windings I knew, and over which I am able to return.

Motoring is liable to violence, Heaven knows, and subject enough to lapses, but lapses not like those of the 'limited train.' Day in and day out by motor you scarcely average more than a cautious, legal twenty miles to the hour on a transcontinental run; and where you stop for the night, right there you will start in the morning, unless it rains. But no matter how much it rains, you will stay and make your next start there, missing nothing of the road as you do on your flying pillow by train. And there is nothing you can afford to miss, whatever the length and the defects of the road. If there is a monotonous mile between Massachusetts Bay and the Channel off Santa Barbara, it must be on one of the routes which we didn't travel.

If they were rather solemn miles to me, especially the first twenty of them in to Boston, I will say for Daphne that I saw her turn, as we mounted the ridge by the quarries, and look off across the hills to where the red-tiled roof of the house showed among the leafless trees. Her face, I thought, was very tender; and gathering Jersey into her arms she squeezed the old dog till he growled with excess of sweet, foreboding pain.

CHAPTER V

OLD MEN DREAM DREAMS

And he growled all the way to Boston, knowing perfectly well that he was to be left at a Fraternity House there, 'a wandering Greek,' but none too welcome a Greek. We were kinder to the old dog than we knew, however, for it turned out to be a hard year on visiting dogs in California, with the hoof-and-mouth disease closing every exit to them, and even the streets and highways. Hard it was; yet what were chains and fumigations and deaths daily along with us to the old dog, when compared with the waiting, the weary winter of waiting for our return! It is a dreadful thing to be a dog and to be loved by a dog. And I tell Daphne that I shall mercifully chloroform every puppy that starts to tag her around hereafter.

The boy was not at the Fraternity House to receive us. We had to unload the live stock, fruit, clothes, and books in his cluttered 'study,' scrawl a hasty note of grief at missing him, leave a check on my bank, shut the door resolutely in the dog's beseeching face, and hurry on for Manchester. But we went by way of the Harvard Law School, which we circled three times in the vain hope of saying good-bye. I hated to start Daphne off with a heartache, though she was accustomed to them. I hated to hurt the boy, too, though knowing that the hurt couldn't compete long with this particular law course. Children don't suffer like dogs.

Our détour to Manchester and on to Saint Paul's School

at Concord, where I was to speak the following night, was taking us off, perhaps fifty miles or more from the direct route; but it would be a good thing for us to leave from as much as we could of New England in our search for The Better Country, in order to have fresh in our minds a goodly country to compare with this better one.

At Saint Paul's, our second night out, I addressed the masters, impressing myself profoundly! The beauty of the situation, the Old-World architecture, the dinner and friendly visit with the genial Rector, the meeting with the faculty, at the very beginning of our trans-American trip, deeply stirred me. By no means my first contact with the private school, the experience, coming at this particular time, more than ever challenged me, as Saint Paul's seemed to me, in the single, swift impression of the visit, unusually English and un-American.

How much of this was *self* impression, I cannot say. Naturally I was going forth to see America, and my eye was single. If not in tune with the Infinite, I was with the United States, now that Hingham was behind me. An ardor of spirit was upon me, a certain *élan* for The Better Country! So was the spell of Saint Paul's upon me as I went to sleep that night — the spell of its picked faculty, its picked Head Master, its picked students, its very picked purpose to be an English-American school. Every fiber of me was English a little way back, stubborn Quaker stuff that settled the West Jerseys. But every fiber of me is American now, stubbornly American, stubbornly democratic, stubbornly for the American, democratic, public school.

But perhaps the spell of the open road was even stronger

upon me as that road stretched four thousand miles before us on the morrow — the spell of my own people between the Saint Croix and the Mississippi, between the Mississippi and the Platte, and beyond the Platte to the Colorado in that vast land of sand and sage, that Titan land from the Rockies to the sea. The spell of more than a hundred millions of Americans was upon me who were thinking, living, feeling utterly unlike the English in England and unlike these boys, it seemed to me, in this ultra-English school.

Is this Old-World culture the right fitting, I wondered, for these New-World boys? And I thought of my own four sons, whether I had done well by them, with this classic place so close at hand, to send them, as I had, into the rough and tumble of the public school.

So I fell asleep under the roof of the good Rector in the midst of his English school, with its English forms and terms and manners. And I dreamed that the Rector lent me his brightest, bravest boy to go with me on my journey, that he might see all that I should see, and feel all that I should feel, on the mighty breast of his mother-land — the whirring cities along the Mohawk Valley, the Great Lakes with their ponderous shipping, Chicago, the Mississippi, the rolling miles of wind-whipped stalks in Iowa, the level miles of golden stubble and emerald wheat in Kansas, cities and more cities, cattle and sheep upon the ranges, salt wells, oil wells, gold mines among the gulches, transcontinental trains, transcontinental motor roads in flowing stone, red men in adobe houses, Mexicans in peaked hats, strange armed plants and fantastic sculpture of winds and waters on the desert, mesa, butte, rimrock and arroyo,

bare, burnt sands drinking water out of concrete bowls upon the shoulders of the mountains, sands that yesterday were ashes, but which to-morrow shall be abloom with cotton, and cool with shade of fig and date-palm and avocado, and green with melon vines and lush alfalfa where white-faced Herefords graze.

All of this, and more, we were to see; and all of it we were to feel, if possible, and understand; that so we might have faith and love for this broad land, its forms and terms and manners, its habitable soil, its cheerful sky, its many and mighty cities, its multi-tongued, multi-millioned, but not amorphous, people. And the lad, if he could find one, was to show me a citizen lord and lackey.

There is nothing this country stands more in need of than thoroughbred Americans. I am not speaking of the war-made hundred per cent American, a spurious, vicious product. There are Americans who 'are too well-bred to be thoroughly bred,' as Thoreau said of Goethe. The well-bred go abroad; so do the thoroughbred; but these latter also travel from Katahdin to the haunted feet of San Jacinto, and from the glaciers of Rainier to the Florida Keys.

And after all what is culture if not knowledge and love of one's own time and place first, hate for what is cheap and evil in them, hope and help for whatever is native and true? It is better for me to be out in the dawn of my own young, rude day, than to mope in the beautiful twilight of a day that is spent and dead.

Whatever is American I wish to know, even how bad we are. Out of what is, out of *all* that is, will come all that is to be. How many Americans in the East know

nothing of the land and the people west of their provincial towns! 'Don't many Westerners come to the place in Maine where you spend the summer?' 'Yes,' the New England lady answered, 'but you don't have to meet them.'

But we were going to meet them. 'A child should have the advantage of ignorance as well as of knowledge, and is fortunate if he gets his share of neglect and exposure' — if so you wish to view the culture of the West. But for Daphne the West was home. The Westerners were her people. And as the car rolled away from the hospitable mansion of the Rector of Saint Paul's in the early morning light, the consciousness that she was reënacting the past, hitting the trail herself which her daring forbears had blazed from Watertown to the Connecticut Valley, and on into the 'fire lands' of the Western Reserve, revealed something to me in Daphne that I had never understood before. For suddenly I saw that she was still the pioneer, and had been from her extraordinary daring that day on the Kennebec to her amazing approval of my quitting the college and Hingham for this hazardous quest of The Better Country. Now I understood the eagerness with which she sent her young sons into the far-off desert, and a thousand other unconventional things, the far-away light, for instance, in her westering eyes as we sped along the frosty road from Saint Paul's with apples and good-byes for the other boy at Amherst.

Like his brothers this boy had done his best to fit us into the modern scheme of things. None of them lacked love, but only approval. We, on our part, had no lack of love, but only lack of approval, sometimes. The Amherst

boy did know one thing well — an automobile. And Lord, how he ran it!

He bit into one of the home apples, looked over our outfit, slipped into my place and embraced the steering wheel. Then he forgot his apple. He forgot his parents, too. Only Heaven will ever know what went on inside of him as he dropped his head an instant upon his arms, and fought off all of his pioneer ancestors on both sides (for mine were Quakers) in his desire to go.

I turned away, for I hated to see him suffer. Life is hard for a boy to understand. It is so incongruous and unfair. Young, lusty, aching for motion and the wide world, what could he make of the fate which chained him to a chair in a chalky classroom, while it left me free at fifty plus, plus mechanical futility, to hold the steering wheel of a fine, new car, my foot on the accelerator, my road where fancy led (after leaving Topeka) — even to California and The Better Country!

But he was sweet and gallant, and after giving us a lot of good advice, kissed us good-bye, his gray eyes, gray like his mother's, somewhat troubled by our behavior, affection and puzzlement contending together in his frank, wholesome face.

His mother turned and waved to him. The car swung out upon the road, and we were heading west,

> West from Oswego to Sault Sainte-Marie,
> And on to where the Pictured Rocks are hung,
> And yonder where, gigantic, wilful, young,
> Chicago sitteth at the northwest gates
> With restless, violent hands and casual tongue
> Moulding her mighty fates,
> The Lakes shall robe them in ethereal sheen;

And like a larger sea, the vital green
Of springing wheat shall vastly be out-flung
Over Dakota and the prairie states.

And still farther on, where,

By desert people immemorial
On Arizonan mesas shall be done
Dim rites unto the thunder and the sun;

and still farther on,

While Shasta signals to Alaskan seas
. . . . . .
And Mariposa through the purple calms
Gazes at far Hawaii crowned with palms.

CHAPTER VI

"UTICA AND THE WEST"

WEST? I had been West before. And I had always been starting West. But this was the first time with Daphne so close to me; the first time I had been so close to the road, so confidently bent upon finding The Better Country. Heretofore I had been about my own affairs. Now I was answering some racial urge, following the migratory line and the restless hope of my people. 'Every sunset which I witness,' says Thoreau, 'inspires me with the desire to go to a West as distant and as fair as that into which the sun goes down. He appears to migrate westward daily, and tempt us to follow him. He is the Great Western Pioneer whom the nations follow.'

Thoreau did not go far West. One does not need to if one goes on foot. But he went daily, and more than any other pioneer who has left a record of his journeys, traveled with his mind. He was forever seeking 'the hound, the bay horse, and the turtle dove' which he had lost, and he was forever seeking for them in the West.

'When I go out of the house for a walk,' he writes, 'uncertain as yet whither I will bend my steps, and submit myself to my instincts to decide for me, I find, strange and whimsical as it may seem, that I finally and inevitably settle *southwest*, toward some particular wood or meadow or deserted pasture or hill in that direction. My needle is slow to settle — varies a few degrees, and does not always point due southwest, it is true, and it has good authority

for this variation, but it always settles between west and south-southwest. The future lies that way to me, and the earth seems more unexhausted and richer on that side.'

Daphne and I were doing nothing rash nor unusual. We were hardly more than gravitating with the human race. Everybody had done what we were doing, or intended so to do as soon as he could make good his escape from the classroom. No, not everybody. There are those of my colleagues who prefer learning to life, who go eastward 'to realize history . . . retracing the steps of the race,' rather than with us 'westward as into the future, with a spirit of enterprise and adventure.'

'Where are you going now?' one of them asked me as I was once leaving on a trip. He was a man of learning whose culture was not only European, but of classic mould.

'Into the Middle West,' I answered with gusto.

'What for?' he pressed.

'For a baptism of democracy.'

'Hm!' he snorted, 'that's all you will get out there.'

'What do you mean?' I asked, this certain assurance and finality, that was hardly befitting the scholar, a bit too evident in his tone.

'All they have in the West is extent and numbers and commonplaceness,' was his unvarnished reply. Then, switching back to books and our earlier conversation, he continued, 'Did it ever occur to you that no great country like ours has ever produced literature? That the single bid this land has made for immortality is Whitman's "Leaves of Grass"?'

Sublime contradiction! No democracy — for this he

meant — has produced literature? Yet the single bid for immortality by this democracy is in the name of democracy by the arch democrat of us all!

> Beautiful world of new superior birth that rises to my eyes
> Like a limitless golden cloud filling the western sky —

So we saw it as we drew away from Amherst, and morning passed to noon, and noon to early evening, and the road led us out through Greenfield, up the valley of the Deerfield River to Shelburne Falls, and over Hoosac Mountain into one of the loveliest prospects of New England.

Many a pass we were to cross, many a wider tableland, but few with juster fame for beauty. Only to-day the prospect was touched with melancholy. November had laid a heavy hand upon the autumn scene.

The wind was keen on the top of the mountain, and up against the pedestal of the great bronze elk which guards the pass I called Daphne's attention to a thin patch of snow. She was not interested, it being in the nature of an omen. But it held me as with an evil eye. I was only partly comforted by the shovel in the car, though I could wield it with any man. Perfectly accustomed to being snowed in on Mullein Hill, I was affected uncommonly by this little heap on the top of Hoosac. I tucked Daphne back into the car and started on. A long road lay before me, some of it higher than Hoosac, and much of it more than a month away.

Yet the sky was clear over Hoosac, except for a smoky haze which had settled about the rim. Dusk had already begun to deepen the valleys, and lamps were lighted as

we came into Williamstown. The place was full of college girls. Williams and Amherst had just concluded another historic battle on the gridiron, Williams a glorious victor; and Smith and Holyoke and Vassar were buying Williams stock at any price. The real effects of a college football victory are not felt for about a generation.

We reached the scene a few minutes after the battle, coming out of the darkened woods into sudden and brilliant festivity. The whole town was celebrating. Doorways were lighted, windows twinkling, headlights swinging corners and gliding up and down the streets, groups of figures everywhere moving among the shadows, laughing, calling, singing to the clash of bells, until the leafless shade trees seem to sing and call and laugh back to the gay companies below, no loyal tree in Williamstown but had attended the game and cheered for victory.

And it was a victory! A famous victory! The greatest educational event in the history of Williams — at least for that college year! And the heights about Williamstown, Greylock, Hoosac, and the Berlin peaks, are echoing with it yet. They were, at least, when we left the seat of learning an hour later, a distant tumult distinctly audible, no sign of cloistered quiet, like a flock of frightened birds, returning to the campus in the hilly town.

My freshman cousin was not at his Fraternity House, but a half-dozen of his obliging brothers rushed about to find him for me. And they did find him — at tea in the home of one of the faculty with a freshman from Vassar. I didn't break up the conference. I would tell his mother, farther west, that I had tried to call on Joseph when passing through Williamstown, but the boy was dis-

cussing his graduate work with a member of the faculty, and couldn't be seen!

But what a thesis he had chosen! I had met the pretty thing in Toledo a year before, and nothing more engaging could possibly come out of Vassar, or any other place. Daphne was a University of Michigan girl — a wonderful institution!

We should have stayed in Williamstown that night, since our only object was to find The Better Country. I have seen Williamstown when, after a single day and night there, one might have no desire to go on to Santa Barbara. And if there is anything lovelier than Williamstown in summer, it is Williamstown in winter. Yet we were bent on getting away from winter, on believing it had no part or lot in The Better Country. So we would pitch in Troy that night; and leaving the cradle of learning in the midst of the universal lullaby, we once more took to the tall woods, deep darkness shrouding our trail.

It is a mistake, however, to motor after dark. A mind so fixed on any destination is out of place on an extended motor tour. The Atlantic and Pacific are too far apart to make night running worth while. We missed the beauty of the road out of Williamstown and a portion of our sleep in Troy. Too late to eat, too tired to read or talk, our report for that day sounds like a paragraph from the Anabasis: all parasangs and nothing but a tent in Troy.

To push on from dawn to dark, and after dark, seeing nothing, resting nowhere, hailing no traveler nor station, is quite truly American, and too descriptive of several of our days. It is exceedingly poor travel. Business requires such travel, no doubt, though not the peculiar business

which we were on, for one must travel leisurely who would come to The Better Country.

One habit I do envy the English — their stopping for afternoon tea! Halting banks and stock markets for tea! They will never prosper as we prosper, even if they adopt our Volstead Act, with so much tea. But there are other national standards than financial prosperity. The quality of culture between a nation which stops for afternoon tea, and one that never stops for anything, say, except oil and gasoline, is immeasurable.

But I think it must be more than balanced by our not stopping for beer. Still we cannot wisely thus compare. Each people after its own genius, tea and beer for the British, coffee and gasoline for us. For so with us it must be. We cannot help it, though we suffer in our culture for it. We have created this Mechanical Monster and he has drunk us dry. The pig-headed and the pious have not done this thing. It is science that has done it — Invention and Big Business, they are the Frankenstein. The thing was inevitable. It is the law of nature that oil and water, gasoline and booze, cannot be mixed. You cannot pump them from the same well, nor sell them from the same corner, nor burn them in the same going car. What has happened to make the trip by motor from Boston to Santa Barbara so reasonably possible had to happen. And it cannot be undone until Detroit turns to breeding horses in place of building cars.

And now it is building a car which does not have to stop for oil between the coasts! When Daphne and I start out on a new search for The Better Country, the non-stop gasoline station shall doubtless have been perfected.

How the sheer size of our land affects us! Daphne cautioned me not to try to feel all of the miles at once which stretched before us on our journey. No one could feel them all at once and survive their number. We ought to travel by foot, of course, if we would rightly travel, walking being the proper function of our feet. But who sings the praises of walking nowadays? Or who could in this land which, from the Foundation, was intended for motor cars and airplanes?

Nothing in the Arabian Nights sounds stranger in these footless times and on our motored highways than an essay like Thoreau's on Walking. It could hardly be written now for very lack of walking words. If we had the words we would not have the concepts to give them meaning. The 'Limited Special,' the 'through route,' the 'Pullman,' 'motorization,' and a multitude of six-cylindered terms with four-wheel brakes are the language of locomotion now, reducing our whole sublime continent to the figment of miles, and life along with the land.

Troy, as I have said, would naturally have been our first night's stop had circumstances not slowed us down. We hurry a great deal, we come to many places, but we do not get very far. We had now been on the road for three days. The car was beginning to limber up. I was settling into my place behind the wheel, although I clearly saw that I should hardly hit 'my stride' this side of Chicago.

The long-run, leisurely gait comes with difficulty to the Yankee driver. The shape and size of New England probably creates a nervous, impatient mind for the handling of our true national spaces. Then, too, the

trains have educated us all to the non-stop run. With speed and power in one's own hand, and so easily in hand, it is hard to adjust the mind, and even more the spirit, to twenty-three continuous days of running straight between our house in Hingham and our house in Santa Barbara! To have to set our watches back an hour at Detroit, another hour at McCook, Nebraska, another hour at Needles, before we can get across, is a discouraging prospect, unless, like Daphne, you feel you have beaten Time by three hours, coming into California with a three hours' lead on Life itself. I tell her that was the reasoning of the old man who spent a winter in Florida, returning to New England feeling ten years younger in the spring; and who kept it up until he died of cholera infantum.

It was Sunday in Troy. I am averse to motoring on Sunday. But Daphne said she was sure that if the Jews had inherited the United States at the time they did the Promised Land, and if Moses had known the automobile, there would have been a different ruling on what constitutes Sabbath-day labor. We got away early, the overcast sky a greater scruple with me, I fear, than my early training. While no flake of snow had wavered into sight, I knew that snow hung heavy over us, and every mile on bare ground I could count as gain. We had not reached Chicago when the first storm of the season swept over the Berkshires, stalling a hundred cars, the papers said, between Pittsfield and Lenox.

Perhaps the children were right. Instead of being on the road we should have been under observation in some quiet psychopathic ward. Daphne entirely agreed with me, saying she thought we should have stayed on Mullein

Hill in the hope of catching pneumonia and saving wear and tear on the car.

The Sunday travel had not begun when, several miles out of Troy we passed a road sign reading,

UTICA AND THE WEST

Daphne jumped as if the car had struck a washout. I got the shock of it, too, for while I am not the pioneer that she is, THE WEST has ever stood to me for all that is adventure and romance. I grew up on it intellectually, on scouts and Indians and the overland stage, since I knew the taste of letters. But one of Daphne's immediate ancestors was the appointed historian of The Oregon Trail. We both jumped, and the car jumped at the actual words on the roadside UTICA AND THE WEST.

Nothing could dampen our spirits or daunt us now. We halted at Syracuse with friends in the thick of more football. Syracuse University had had a game the day before and lost it, the undergraduate daughter of our hosts still fighting and winning the battle of her college brother as the Sabbath sun declined. Through the apple orchards and past the cider mills of New York State we hurried, avoiding Buffalo for fear of another football game, but ran head on to one in Chicago. How many we missed in the corner of Pennsylvania I do not know, nor how many in Ohio and the upper edge of Indiana; but the size of the game in Chicago made good whatever number of games we escaped on the way.

We landed in Chicago on the eve of the 'pep meeting.' Our friends had three daughters heading straight for college and a son nearly through. They lived hard by the

University, and the 'pep meeting' was an all-family affair. Indeed, it was an all-city affair. Chicago was to be there. The head coach was to be there. It was rumored that he might even say something. The great cheer leader of course was to be there. He injected the 'pep.' The mayor of the city might be there. It was going to be just grand, the biggest howl for the local team ever put across by Chicago! And we must go.

The girls were in gay raiment. They brought out newspaper cuts of the teams, and genuine autographed pictures of the heroes, spreading them in bewildering numbers everywhere. They recounted to us the personal histories of the players and their memorable plays until I was in a mental fumble with the ball. Not only the qualities and characteristics of the godlike ones did they recount, but the probable line-up on the morrow; what would happen if the weather were clear and cold; what if muggy; what if it rained. They explained exactly what would happen if A were substituted at right end, and what if B were used instead, and what if C or D or E or F — all six good men of the second, third, and other minor strings. The regular right end had a dislocated collar bone, a sprained ankle, and three floating ribs, and there was a possibility that he might not be allowed to play to-morrow, at least not in both halves.

'So you *will* go to the "pep meeting," won't you?' they pleaded.

'And waste the good medicine?' I asked. 'I can't possibly stay to see the game. I have a lecture to-morrow afternoon over in Indiana.'

'Never mind Indiana!' they chimed. 'Indiana is going

to play football too, and everybody'll go to the game. No use to speak to Indiana until after Thanksgiving.'

'But the scalpers are getting fifty dollars a ticket,' I countered. 'How can you get us in?'

Instantly two tickets to the great stadium were put into my hand.

'That's how,' said the sweet Louise. 'And don't think now that any one in this University of Chicago is not going to see that game!'

I didn't for a moment think so, though I did give the tickets back to Louise. I had no right to attend the game when there wasn't half enough room in the Bowl for the State of Illinois, nor for Chicago alone, indeed. It is a huge bowl. But Chicago is a huge town, an immense town. It is destined to be a vast city some day, without a rival for size in the whole world. It needs a big bowl. It didn't exactly suspend operations in order to attend the game. It doesn't declare a holiday every time her team plays the team from Madison or Ann Arbor or Urbana in the Bowl, but that is only because the whole of Chicago cannot quite crowd into the Bowl.

The girls returned from the 'pep meeting' as croupy as crows. 'It certainly was just grand, the grandest thing that ever happened in Chicago!' I was a little skeptical myself, for I had seen some very grand things in Chicago, happenings so prophetic as to cause me to wonder where in the future, if not here on the shores of Lake Michigan, shall be found The Better Country.

But I am not clear in my mind, nor quite easy in my spirit, about football, and our American proxy play. We largely do our own work in America, but we hire our play.

And the gladiatorial temper of it, its finished professionalism, the spectacular cast it wears, and the pitch of the public's enthusiasm for it, only paralleled in the arena back in the evil days of Rome, disturbs my Americanism with misgivings. I personally know that the children of this Chicago family never really play; nor do their parents; nor do millions of other American children and their parents. But how they play by proxy!

I am not sure that the cure is in fewer and smaller bowls; but perhaps in larger and larger bowls, and more of them — college bowls, municipal bowls, township and county bowls, until every boy shall have his bowl, and every girl, too, unless she prefers a court. No people on earth has greater need than the American people to play. And we need to play together, as a way of pulling together. And out of pulling and playing together, we may some day come to dream together, a huge dream, bigger, more beautiful, than Walt's, a newer, bolder bid for immortality than lesser lands have ever made.

CHAPTER VII

WE CROSS THE MISSISSIPPI

The morning of December 8 broke fair over Chicago and its inland sea. A late Indian Summer still lingered in Illinois, and the days were dreamy, and there was no news of the Middle West in the Los Angeles 'Times.' So the weather had been for two weeks; and for two weeks the car with its freight for The Better Country had been shut in a Chicago garage beside the Lincoln Highway fretting the life out of its battery at the unaccountable delay. Little leaf-fires smoked in the streets about the borders of the city; the sleepy air was full of drifting cobweb balloons and lazy clouds; and every afternoon the dull concrete reaching westward was touched by the gilding of the sun — the very color of motoring, and so different from the silver of the snow!

Yet no one touched the starter. The neutral gears ached to mesh in action; and if ever a crank-shaft had the cramps and longed to stretch its crooked spine, it was the crank-shaft in this Better Country car. Day after day of this fair, false weather passed, bewitching the driver into believing that he had found The Better Country.

It had bewitched him, indeed, but not quite beguiled him. He knew that Indian Summer could not last forever, not in Illinois; that the tepees in the corn fields must soon be folded, that the ghosts of the Illini must vanish, and the thin blue smoke of their council fires and peace-pipes fly before the coming of the fierce Kabibonokka, who

Had his dwelling among icebergs
In the kingdom of Wabasso,
In the land of the White Rabbit.

'If this will only continue forever!' Daphne would say every fragrant morning.

'But it won't,' was all that I could answer, the more golden the day, the gloomier my forebodings, and the more settled my suspicions of Chicago weather. I was impatient to be off.

Still there was something impressive and puzzling in the size of Chicago, something which cannot be reconciled with utterly bad weather. The health and vigor of the place! The noise, the confusion, the spread, and the suburbs of the place! The schools and museums and galleries, and especially the churches of the place! And more especially the dreams of the place — or was it the mood of my quest upon me and the spell of the slumberous Indian Summer? For I saw two cities, one about me in the mighty maelstrom of its business; the other brooding upon the bosom of its great lake, a fair, celestial city, not the reflection of the other, but its prophetic dream.

So I was almost persuaded that I had come to The Better Country, and might have stayed but for the newspapers, ugly, misbegotten monsters, which issue daily from their noisome dens to suckle the city on crime. The traffic officers kept me nervous, too. They punish you for not speeding. Accidents are expected. Dead men don't count.

But the man who is 'stalled.' is the man who is 'balled,'
On Michigan Avenue.

I lacked the necessary 'pick-up,' or 'get-away,' as the

motor salesmen put it. The fact is I had stayed too long in Hingham, probably. One who leaves Hingham as late as fifty-five looking for a better country is liable to miss some of the good points of Chicago. And Daphne agreed with me that we had better go on to Omaha.

The morning of December 8 found us again upon the road. We had stayed over the night before in La Grange, and with this good start, and a road paved with fourteen-carat gold, we flung ourselves in front of the sunshine and sped away — to be 'woning fer by westè.'

Our plan was to cross the Mississippi at Clinton, on the Lincoln Highway, by noon, the dusk to find us nestling deep in the black bosom of Iowa, the mammy of the States. But the run was better than our resolves, bringing us into Clinton a little ahead of schedule, and to the Mississippi. One ought to linger by the banks of the noble river, and every American ought to build an altar there.

> O, Tiber, Father Tiber,
> To whom the Romans pray.

What would have been the Romans' prayer upon the banks of the longest river in the world? How would the city of the Cæsars look along the Mississippi? Rome was not built in a day. But see what has been built in America in hardly more than a day! And when the cities upon the Saint Lawrence are finished, and upon the Penobscot, and the Kennebec, and the Merrimac, and the Connecticut, and the Hudson; when they are finished along the Delaware, and the Susquehanna, and the Roanoke, and the Rappahannock, and the James, and the Great Pedee, the Santee, and the Savannah; when they are finished upon

the Altamaha, and the Saint John's, the Indian, the Suwanee, the Chattahoochee, and the Tennessee; when they are finished upon the Cumberland, and the Ohio, and the Kankakee, and the Missouri, and the Platte, and the Kansas, and the Arkansas, and the Red and the Rio Grande; when they are finished upon the Colorado and the Rogue and the Snake, and the Willamette and the Columbia — when all of the cities are finished from the Yukon to the Caloosahatchee, how then shall the grandeur that is America compare with the grandeur that was Rome?

And as I stood upon the bridge which spanned the Mississippi, I thought of Springfield, and Mount Vernon, and Concord, and Camden; and I heard Walt chanting —

A great city is that which has the greatest men and women,
If it be a few ragged huts it is still the greatest city in the whole world.

From the bridge I dropped a crust of our noonday lunch down into the long, brown current of the river as a propitiation to whatever water god or catfish might be swimming below and note our crossing. This was the rainy season, and The Great Father of Waters should see that I had uncovered on the bridge and offered prayer. It is a good thing to pray when going west of the Mississippi in a motor car — until the concrete comes. Bone-dry weather is the thing to pray for.

Daphne says I didn't pray on the bridge; that all I did was to stand there feeding the catfish and wishing I had a hook and line. But she's a Presbyterian and I'm a fisherman, and all she knows are Presbyterian prayers. Though there is but one God, I tell her, there are many altars; and

I know unshrived men who walk with God up a trout brook, and pray every time they look at their rod and flies.

That bridge of the Mississippi was a great adventure, however, for both of us. We paid no toll — not that. We were in no accident. Nothing 'really happened' as Daphne would say of such things as come off in the spirit. The great adventure was to see the Mississippi below us; and to realize that everything East was behind us; that now we were actually stepping into the West, into

The certainty of space, increase, freedom, futurity.

At the first touch of Iowa everything looked suddenly different. The car began at once to act differently — Westernly, if you will. We began to feel Westernly, and to breathe big, Western breaths, and to gaze in a long, Western way. Even Daphne, who will allow nothing for the imagination, began to fluff herself out and crowd me in the front seat as if she felt herself expanding to meet the expanding scene. This was only Iowa. We had but just left Clinton, and were coming next to Clarence, not to Santa Barbara; yet both of us felt that we were on the borders of The Better Country, if not actually now across. Still there wasn't much to see away to the slowly heaving horizon except an infinitely roomy, restful land of spaces, and for every space a roomy home.

As the swift miles fanned out rearward, I thought of a certain Boston friend who never travels in the United States because of his sensitiveness to scenery. I wished he were along to see Iowa this winter afternoon: the pale glow in the mighty gates toward which we were hastening, the gabled peaks and ridgepoles and weather vanes ablaze

in the early setting sun; and below in the gray-blue shadows the ricks and stacks and sheds and cribs, the wheeled kit, and all of the varied clutter of the farmyards.

For I wished to ask him where beneath the kindly roof of Heaven had he seen human life so amply cradled, so abundantly provided, so self-sufficiently lived as in this infinitude of Iowa farms? Near and far to the verge of the sunset the impressive homesteads stood in order as we bowled along, not casually disposed, but regularly, spatially set in the ranging landscape as if obeying some natural law. So encircling was the human scene, so distantly repeated, so balancing the picture and blending with the theme of Nature, as to make one think these houses had grown here, planted when the rich, mellow prairie was spread out for the plough.

Yet it is not a mellow, rural scene as in England, where Nature 'has been so long under the dominion of man, has been taken up and lain down by him so many times, worked over and over with his hands, . . . that she has taken on something of his image, and seems to radiate his presence.' It is rather a natural scene, where man was plainly the intention of Nature, her chief and continuous work. Nowhere in the world have I felt a more perfect harmony between earth and man than among the farms of Iowa, nor more comfortable space and spiritual freedom between man and man.

Here, to begin with, the land had been taken up and lain down, worked over and over by the hands of Nature, 'fed and fattened' by her toil and industry, and so made ready to feed and fatten man. Sites were even mounded every so often in the fields for house and barns. Such

mammoth barns! And such broods of lesser buildings roundabout! Close by stands the house beneath a group of planted trees, often barricaded from the sweeping winds by outer walls of trees. Overtopping the trees and the roofs rise the windmill and the twin silos, adding a touch of Norman times, towers and keeps to guard the wide, flanking fields and the rich booty of the yards below: cribs of eared corn, stacks of hay and weathered chaff, swine and burly cattle, horses, mules, sheep, chickens, and machinery to outfit a feudal lord.

But the dwellings are not the castles of lords, and not to be compared with the barns. Animal life is better bred and better housed than human life. The Iowa farmer is not up to the standard of the Iowa farm. Not so well built as in Wisconsin, the big Iowa barn is still the best architecture in the State, and accurately expresses the standardization and emphasis of Western farm life. It bulges with room and health and fatness; whereas the house by contrast looks ill-ventilated and lean. See the lightning rods upon the barn! The house, however, is unprotected. If Jove smites, let him smite the house, not the barn with its hay and blooded stock. But what God would be jealous of the American farmer's house, or the lot of his wife, or their bank account?

Daphne begged me to dwell on the universal scene as we floated along, and not to stop in the front yards of the farmers. 'You can get too close to a picture,' she reminded me. 'Of course the farmer's wife lives in the kitchen,' she went on. 'So did I on Mullein Hill when we were farming. And you lived and moved and had your being in the barn. There's a house now without any front steps. And see the

docks and teasles in the yard. But did you ever see cleaner, lovelier fields? I'm going to look at the prospect, for everywhere it pleases, and only man is . . .'

'Is what, Daphne? Why don't you finish your hymn?'

'I can't, for these Iowa farmers are not vile. They are Republicans, and deserve their present bankruptcy. Is there anything stupider than the political mind? And anything political more vicious than the protective tariff?'

'Tut! tut! dearie! Dwell on the prospect, not on politics,' I urged her, patting her hand.

'That's what I was doing,' she moaned, 'until you began taking the joy out of it. But don't I know that the farmer this year, for all of his money and all of his labor invested, got just four hundred and forty dollars out of his American farm? Less than one third the earnings of other workers in the United States? And out of this four hundred and forty dollars comes depletion of soil, deterioration of implements, depreciation of improvements, losses by weather and disease to crops and stock . . .'

'Daphne! Daphne! Don't talk like this in Iowa!'

'Why, this is just the place for it!' she cried, a red spot in her cheek, a dangerous violet light in her eye. Then she added sadly, her statistical brain still figuring, 'If deductions were allowed as in other forms of business, it would show ninety-five per cent of all our farmers in red for their year's operations. And there is just one explanation for it.'

'You're utterly right, dear; but if we have to slay the tariff beast first, we shall never come to The Better Country.'

'Then we might just as well turn back to Hingham,' she answered as the car sped on toward Santa Barbara.

The fire still smouldered in the cheek next to me when she said quietly:

'But did you ever see such magnificent farms! There isn't one in sight that isn't worth forty thousand dollars! With an average annual income of only four hundred and forty!' she groaned.

'Forget your figures, and let's go by appearances, Daphne.'

'We can't.'

'But most people do. And how else *should* one do with scenery? Look at the forty-thousand-dollar scenes about us! And the forty-million-dollar sunset in front of us!'

Really with the winter sunset in our eyes, everything looked like forty million dollars in gold, docks and teasles as good as cosmos and goldenglow in the front yards. Every farmer to meet us shone in a glowing new car, at least a four-thousand-dollar car. We fled across a continuous maternal lap, entranced with the charm of the new flatness and thrilled by its grandeur, speeding eagerly to embrace it, and lingering as we passed every group of farm buildings, especially if they were painted red, and stood about a white dwelling, and over against the black of freshly ploughed fields.

Those black, black fields! Here lies a forty-acre piece just turned by the tractor, the curdy furrows from the mole-boards lapping as even as the feathers in a raven's wing. Beside it, as if stretched on a frame of fences, spreads another forty-acre square in fine, green-stitched wheat. And against the young wheat, its back to the winter wind,

stands a forty-acre tract of ragged, shivering corn, with Herefords, or Devons, or Ayrshires with wildish horns, stripping and trampling the stalks.

Out of the soil, the son of a farmer, with a bit of land of my own in Hingham, I found myself on the soil of Iowa with awe-shod feet. For if it were not holy ground, it was miraculous ground, the next thing to holy, so fertile was it, and so fit for the plough!

With my own hands I could almost shape the fat stuff into living forms. It lowed from excess of black richness — and there were black Angus cattle grazing in the corn; it clucked — and there were black Minorca hens scratching about the farmyards; it grunted — and there were black Poland China hogs rooting in the clover. Meat made while you were motoring past straight out of the protoplasmic muck! For Daphne's sake I will say that I did not see the miracle of full-grown cattle, swine, and fowls made out of hand from the soil. The laws of Nature prevail in Iowa as elsewhere. Life *grows* in Iowa, but not as it grows in Massachusetts.

A shovelful of Iowa's dynamic mould dropped hard upon my glacial garden in Hingham might very likely explode from sheer pressure of life. And here in Iowa were endless square miles of it, and all of it miles deep, apparently. A larger portion of Iowa is tilled than of any other State in the Union. And the trouble with Iowa is her excess of pigs over people, the impossibility of consuming her own pork and pone.

Instead of pork and pone we shall soon be making motor power out of corn, and feeding Iowa's surplus to automobiles. For the gasoline shall fail; but the alcohol in

Iowa's inexhaustible soil shall never fail. Then, in place of the oil well in California and Texas and Oklahoma, shall spring up the alcohol still in Illinois and Iowa; and an acre of corn land shall be worth a thousand shares of oil stock; and The Standard Alcohol Company of America shall own Iowa outright; and Long Beach, California, shall be the hangout of beggars and hoboes.

I wasn't born in a New Jersey corn field to pass through Iowa lightly. Daphne is the product of corn lands in Ohio and looked upon Iowa only to love it, not, with me, to wonder. I was for buying one of the forty-thousand-dollar farms in spite of Daphne's statistics. An Iowa farm is such a contrast to a college classroom! And on we went through the maternal miles, owning more and more of the tar-black, beaver-bottom glebe, quarter-sections and sections, a fuller-breasted, wider-lapped, more uniformly fertile country than any Promised Land of song or story.

And as for scenery, 'selected scenery' of my Boston friend — Iowa is all selected scenery, if you have an eye for it. There is one heaven-kissing hill in Iowa towering seven hundred and forty-five feet above the level of the sea. Yet you would hardly motor all the way from New England to Iowa for just one hill, even if it is as high as that. But there is scenery and scenery, and in Iowa it is corn. I thrill at a furrow. I love a fistful of soil, fecund, arable, habitable loam; subsoiled, sifted, fined, and mellow. A plough thrills me. So does a drill, a harrow, and a hoe. There is romance for me in a string of red drain tile across a soggy, sour field. And if I had it, I told Daphne, I would risk up to forty thousand in Iowa alcohol.

So on we plunged deeper and deeper into Iowa, and into

possession of more and more of her magic acres. The sun was gradually getting ahead of us, and toward evening came coursing down the sky plumb into the Lincoln Highway, hit a stretch of hard surface, and bounded along before our car until it disappeared over a crest against the sky, its tail-light leaving a yellow, lambent flame within our westering eyes.

It touched the road and filled the car and caught like a nimbus in Daphne's snowy hair. Off on our left a broad, warm band of it ran through the leafless trees and broke among the buildings of a quiet farm. Pigs and a flock of hens were scurrying toward the farmer in the yard who was starting to unharness a team of heavy sorrels from a double sulky plough. A boy was driving cows into the barn. All day in the large open fields hearing the rip of the clover sod! All day in the furrow with the mouldboard and under heaven with the horses and the birds and the winds and the consciousness of this large company and of life! Now for the evening chores, the scent of hay, feeding and bedding down the stock, the big barn, the sheds, the bulging cribs, supper, the paper, and the silence of the stars!

It does not pay as the city pays. You handle seed, loam, animals, weather, seasons, and first causes on the farm, not money. The farm never paid in money. It never can while it pays so abundantly in life. It can never be more than 'a home and a job' until you see it, not as a business, but as a way of life. As a way of life it is shy of the city, but walks boldly with Nature and with God.

Our road was now awash with shadows, the light and the half-light fading into winter dark. But we had caught a glimpse of something, of the thing we were seeking, pos-

sibly; and it is not every day of travel which fetches one so far along. We had covered two hundred and seventy miles since morning, and they were bringing us, weary enough, into the city of Belle Plaine, halfway between Chicago and Omaha — and to THE HERRING, 'the swellest little hotel in Iowa.'

CHAPTER VIII

BEYOND THE HILLS OF BOONE

A HOTEL man by all of his endocrines, our Host of The Herring opened wide his hospitality and waved us into possession of the whole house. The Herring was ours from the register to the roof if we had legs enough for the climb. An autograph picture of Mark Twain on the wall caught my unsteady eye. Autograph letters and photographs of actors, writers, and public men were all over the walls.

'You're in the home of the literati,' said mine host, his eye as quick as it was penetrating. He had my points like a practiced horse trader. 'I've entertained other great men, you see.'

I braced up visibly, and asked about something to eat.

'We don't serve meals,' he replied with fervor, 'but I have the best radio set in this town, if not in the entire State. Be my guests at the concert to-night, I beg you. *Do* you like the Gold Dust Twins? Maybe you're going West — to California, maybe? I thought so. I can tell the Long-Beach look every time, I've seen it so often.'

'To Santa Barbara,' Daphne broke in.

'Sure! I knew you weren't from Iowa. But the look is just the same — uptilted like, over the tassels of the corn. But folks who overlook Iowa, I tell 'em, will overlook California. That's the reason they go to Long Beach — to keep on gazin' out to sea. Have you ever seen Iowa, my friend?'

I had seen Iowa, ever since noon, but with eyes uptilted

like, over the tassels of the corn! Daphne gave me a tweak, and I picked up my bag, breaking off a conversation which she feared might keep me in Iowa forever, a hoe in my hand, my eyes never higher than the corn.

Our eyes were hardly more than waist-high now, for we were both hungry. I was wolfish. With Daphne right beside me all of the time I had not been able to sneak a single between-bite, and so new and terrible were the sensations of real hunger that I knew I was coming down with something fatal.

I felt more hopeful on our return from the café, just as Daphne predicted, and, joining the other guests, escorted Daphne to the parlor to attend the concert upon the air. Our host tried to pick up California, in order to save us the journey thither by motor, as he put it, but The Herring was too full of 'bones,' the static spoiling everything over Belle Plaine that night except the Bedtime Story — a very good story about two baby woodchucks who got chucked into the woods and were lost.

'How they ever got in,' the dramatic voice was saying, when we tuned into it, 'they could not tell. Whatever to do to get out, they did not know'. . . static, and a sudden touch of sleep! But I lost the trail only for an instant. Daphne must have thought I was trying to punch the face of Morpheus as I fought my way back to consciousness and stood by.

'Then they came to a track through the thick woods,' the incisive voice out of heaven cut on, 'where a F!!!RR!!! R!!!D [awful static] car had gone along, and the baby woodchucks began picking up the p!!!r!!!t!!t!!ts. And they kept on picking up the parts, and they kept on following the

track until they . . . came to Belle Plaine,' and Daphne was shaking me and telling me I must go shave for an early start in the morning, and that I hadn't heard a single word of the Bedtime Story. Probably not. Daphne usually knows, it being necessary in every household for somebody to know. If I hadn't heard it, I certainly had caught the drift of it, for I went about two hundred and seventy miles asleep.

Thus nightly the entire nation goes into radio sleep, and from noon on into an aërial siesta, lulled by the voices in the sky, with scarcely a gray goose about the walls to clack us into roused alarm. I had no talk with mine host. I traded nothing I had of Massachusetts for anything he had of Iowa. The books in my study might have spoken to the books in his hotel, had we not sat with the ears of rabbits listening in. The proprietor of The Herring had many things to tell me which now I shall never hear.

I don't take the radio as hard as Daphne does. She was for moving right on out of Iowa at discovering it here, for Nebraska, if haply she might come to a country of reading and conversation. I was for seeing more of Iowa. Having penetrated the West thus far, it seemed a pity not to look about us. Two hundred and seventy miles within the corn belt was something worth attending to. It was a goodly land, in spite of radios. The Anakim were here, I felt sure, and we should pay them our respects.

Who knows, I asked her, but that we might find giants right here in Belle Plaine? Out as we were for The Better Country, it would be a pity to fail of our quest for lack of patience or because of prejudice. Wasn't the champion heavyweight hog-caller of the world over in Nebraska?

Wasn't there a brand-new prima donna over in Kansas City, Missouri? I was glad that we were headed for Nebraska, I told Daphne, for I thought I had rather hear the champion hog-caller, there being something distinctly Western in hog-calling, something really wild. Nebraska was our country, probably; but we should know when we heard the hog-caller calling us home. I suppose there is a little of the wild boar left in me, I explained to Daphne; and she said that she had often noticed the bristles, and how I am always rooting about in the woods; but all in all, she is glad my tastes are rather simple, toward sassafras and spruce gum and the wholesome forest mast.

But the middle west is also prolific in politicians, almost every wolf among the party sheep at Washington coming from this country. It is a great land for raising college presidents for the Eastern market, too; and especially given to raising New York City editors and writers. So with sculptors and inventors and preachers. A great country, surely, and if we only knew the truth about it, The Better Country, right here in Belle Plaine! But Daphne thought Omaha a more likely place, it being our next stop, and a trifle farther west. So she was up betimes in the chilly dawn, doing her daily dozen getting me up.

The Anakim were not abroad yet. It was too raw for them. Nothing was abroad yet, and there was nothing much to be seen except a triple plate of frost upon the shingles of Belle Plaine, and a thin dull line of light seeping through a crack in the sky off in the direction of Chicago. An unpropitious day! I shaved in cold water and thought of travelers in swift, warm sleeping-cars.

The lift was as flat as the earth and was clamped down

like a man-hole cover over Iowa. My thoughts were not very high. The world from my window reminded me of a frying-pan. In the pan I could almost smell something cooking in the way of weather. This getting up before breakfast puts a dour face on the world. But Daphne says somebody must get up before breakfast, or who would build the kitchen fire?

Not much concerned about the cooking weather, and not due in Omaha until to-morrow night, I was for lingering, always for lingering. Daphne was for going on, always for going on.

'Something warns me not to waste a minute,' she protested, rubbing her left knee ruefully.

'Something in your left knee?' I was trying to warm up the situation a little.

'Yes, and something in my right one, too.'

'I thought we had left our knees in Hingham, Daphne?'

'But that isn't saying they stayed there. Mine arrived in Belle Plaine this morning. Besides, this is another Sunday, and we must be off.'

I have always had trouble with the calendar, especially with what day of the month and week it is, and when the Fourth of July comes (Daphne says). Yesterday and to-morrow never strongly appealed to me, but I was always acutely aware of Sunday — not to travel on it. Where I was a boy nobody would travel on the cars of a Sunday. Instead, they went about in buggies, buckboards, surreys, and spring-wagons on Sundays, arriving at our house in shoals. Everybody went to church but mother, who had everybody to feed. To this day I shrink from *meeting* people on their way to church. I was glad that Daphne

had me up early, for it looked, I thought, like a fundamentalist town somewhat, and I wanted to be well on my way before the preaching began. So between old fears and Daphne, always new, we were upon the streets of Belle Plaine before the earliest Catholics were out for mass. I like to see the pious worshipers stream along, so nicely starched and ironed and gloved, and carrying their prayers in little books — such a sure and easy grip on God! I could readily fall in with them and go to mass early on a Sunday morning, get my own sins forgiven, pray a little for Daphne, and thus with petition and matin begin the holy day.

We would go to church in the evening, Daphne said, after we got to Omaha. For if it was going to rain, and it certainly looked lowering, our praise would be more comely behind the rain than before it, because she didn't know any motorist like me for losing his religion in the rain. I called her attention to the run we had made yesterday. Another such run would land us in Omaha, and we had *two* days to make it in! Why not behave like Christians to-day? She yielded the point up to the end of a leisurely breakfast, and when we trundled out of the town it was on sausage, buckwheat cakes, and coffee — a magic carpet that made nothing of time and space and this black road in Iowa.

There is more in that last clause than meets the eye. Grossly ignorant of the nature and behavior of the black roads of Iowa, we found ourselves on unctuous, kissing tires, thrilling along a sort of motor aqueduct, which seemed to be paved with a noiseless rubberoidal compound, the color and consistency of slightly yielding asphaltum. It was a wonderful surface of sun-cured corn land, elastic, speedy,

stippled without being washboardy, incomparably titillating, but highly nervous stuff, of strange spissitude, and affecting the car nervously.

'Wings! Wings!' cried Daphne as we swept along. 'It's better than Ferris Wheels and Scenic Railways at Paragon Park!' — the titillation of the road, this, for I had never been able to get Daphne to look in the direction of Paragon Park. We were shooting along the top of the bank as a scared cat shoots along the top of a wall. Two abysmal ditches, deep Avernal moats, one on each side of the road, ran like a Nemesis under and along with us.

I'm a cautious driver, and never quite gambler enough for Daphne. She was having a real thrill out of this skyline road, however, a greater sense of levitation inherent in its construction per speed-mile than is built into any other road that I have traveled. The fewest feet of perpendicular to the plane of Iowa create the illusion of stellar heights, especially to the Eastern visitor moving over such a perpendicular between its deep ditches, that seem to speed him profoundly. Perspective in Iowa is out of focus. The shadow of a great rock should fall across the level-weary land. The people do build big barns and silos and towering windmills; but like the earlier Indians and the Egyptians they must build burial mounds and pyramids for cæsural pauses to vary the mighty rhythms across their metered, monotonous miles.

So gayly were we stepping along that neither of us took much notice of the weather, of 'the looks downcast and damp' on the countenance of Iowa. We knew that we were on the wet side of a sagging western sky, but there was nothing in our previous experience, and next to nothing in

Daphne's disposition, to lead us into speculation. Besides, we seemed to be making extraordinary speed, so nearly flying over Iowa, and even now alighting on the distant bank of the Missouri, that we really made faces at the sour face of the weather. I remember how Daphne was chanting quite irreverently,

> They had na sailed a league, a league,
> A league but only three,
> When the lift grew dark, and the wind blew loud,
> And gurly grew the sea,

as out of the dark lift a snowflake wavered down, a white, wet snowflake, that touched the windshield like a pure cold kiss and vanished, leaving a tiny slobbered spot.

Then everything began to spit. And simultaneously everything began to slide. And we were somewhere beyond the rolling hills of Boone.

Here was something new — a new form of motion, a new contact with the earth. I had skidded before this in Massachusetts, but never without some sense of the crusty globe beneath me, some expectation of bedrock. Here nothing — nothing even gritty geological, the very moral order of the universe without firmness or fiber! The car seemed about to dissolve, its reins no longer a frame of fabricated steel, but spilled and quaking jelly. And when it stopped going round, it lay sprawling in the elemental ooze of that Iowa road with about as much purpose as a mud-puppy.

And I was a mountain aspen! My moral collapse was as groveling as the automobile's. Suspense and sickening impotence had been my experience in previous skids. Out

of Boone, however, I could this day go and dig up moral portions of me that there got stuck forever in the muck.

Had the heavy curtain overhead been suddenly ripped like a bedtick the feathers could hardly have fallen faster than the snow. Omaha was blotted from the horizon in a moment. Our motion forward had become rotary, and our certain destination one or the other of the ditches below the road. What ultimately happens to the ditched in Iowa was not explained to me. We saw seven cars in the course of that afternoon, standing on their radiators or sitting on their tail-lights or stretched their length within the ditches, and wholly unguarded, as if their occupants had been swallowed by the mud. I wonder if there is any record of a car's having been stolen from an Iowa ditch?

We had come to rest square across the crown of the high-road.

'Well!' said I.

'Well!' said Daphne, and added, 'But let's go on!'

'Which way?' was all that I could answer. Daphne didn't pursue the subject, so I drew a deep breath and felt myself expanding like an accordion. Daphne still looked a little corrugated, I thought, and took a few rhythmic breaths herself. But neither of us laughed, as the insane do when they skid. Instead I was looking through the cleared half-moon of my windshield straight into the right-hand ditch.

'Suppose somebody comes along?' Daphne said.

'But nobody can,' I assured her. 'All motor travel in Iowa has ceased.'

'One thing is sure,' she continued. 'We can't stay here forever, so we had as well go right along.'

'Listen, Daphne. The only gears in this car that I know about go forward or reverse. In either of those directions lies a ditch. You can idle these gears, but you can't sidle 'em.'

'Please don't complain to me about its gears,' she went calmly on. 'You bought this car. When I buy one it will go in Iowa just as well as in Massachusetts. We're rested now, let's go.'

'Go *how?*' I protested.

'I don't know,' and she looked at me sweetly. 'You have never encouraged my driving. This is your problem. If it were mine, I'd solve it!'

'So you would!' And I kissed her out of pure admiration. Then I got out and put on the rear chains. It was lucky that I kissed her first. When the impossible has to be done, you do it. Prone across the road, as you might lay a man over a barrel, lay the car. And it was a Sunday, too! I used the tire tool on my shoes, but there was no scraping of my suit.

'Now, Daphne,' I argued, as I got in behind the wheel, 'I think you had better step out into the snow while I try to get back lengthwise of the road. You would never forgive me if I should upset you in the ditch.'

'I never would forgive you, please make a note of that,' she answered. 'And I never will if you spill the car in. I'm going to sit right here so you won't dare go near the ditch.' And there she sat.

I couldn't argue with both of them together, so I concentrated on the car. Cutting the wheels as far west as I could twist them, I started the engine. There was a sound behind like the churning of butter. Then through the car

a thudding as of 'coming' butter, a gathering under the rear mudguards so deep and thick as to stop the paddles. Such bobbins of clay as those wheels had wound up! I cut it off, clawed it off, going in for mud, all over for mud, to give as good as I got.

Daphne shrank from me. Possibly I spread myself a trifle. This was *my* problem, I was told, and there was no limit to the mud I was allowed so long as I kept out of the ditch.

Again I meshed in. The mud flew. Into the flank of the road went the car like a terrier digging for a rat. We were holding our own. Then I bethought me. Taking a copy of the Chicago 'Tribune,' I spread its dry sheets under the four wheels, and got back to my saddle. I was prepared to let her buck. Jamming my foot on it, as I would have jabbed the rowels into a mustang's withers, I took that piece of road for a ride. I got the jump on it. How we bucked! I'm not boasting. Unless I had to, I never could do the trick again. When our private *rodeo* was over, we were all a little dizzy, but I could see, from the grapevine which we had skated in the snow, that we were pointing toward Omaha and The Better Country.

The concrete is coming, and this is soon to pass away. Then it may rain or snow, but we shall go on, careless of ditches, midnight as noontime, no surcease from our perpetual motion. But let us pray that the détour may occur even then occasionally, if not to stall us, at least to slow us down.

We crawled along westward, flanking and fiddler-crabbing among the slick ruts, just traction enough in the newspapers, when we met a car, to save us from the yawn-

ing ditch and win us back the crown. A ghost-white dusk was shivering up and down the steeps of Dunlap as we warped into the blinking streets, shaken a little in spirit, and not much advanced since morning toward The Better Country.

Poor Daphne was cramped and stiff, and her hands were cold as I helped her out of the car. Giving them a warming squeeze, I assured her that I wouldn't let this sort of thing happen again. She looked sadly at me and thought of the tussle she would have the very next morning to get me out upon the road.

CHAPTER IX

WHEN IT RAINS IN KANSAS

I WILL adopt Daphne's name for our hostelry in Dunlap and call it THE KILN. Dunlap took us in, and if that is all that we can say for Dunlap, we have said enough. We remember only one other place along the route with the desperate gratitude we feel for Dunlap. Shaken in purpose and dampened as I seldom have been in spirit, I was the last to register at The Kiln that night, for the house was full, full of clay images more or less in the supposed likeness of God, who were set up about the stove in the middle of the room to dry. Some had already begun to harden and drop in terra-cotta shards to the floor.

Daphne took them all in eagerly. She picked her way among the casts, tucked her slippered feet like a pair of birds up on the rungs of her chair, to get them out of the gobs and grit on the floor, and cut into the conversation, like a modern dancer, with the old boy on her right. They were old acquaintances, apparently, though Daphne had never been in Dunlap before, nor had she a date with Dunlap for this particular trip. It's a good place wherever it is, she says, if there are people and no radios there. There was a phonograph in sight, but happily it was broken, so the talk flowed full and free.

We were seated in a combination office, foyer, and general family living-room, the lady of the house, under a lamp by herself, adding a dear domestic touch to the traveled scene, as she mended a pile of freshly washed

union suits. Daphne was decidedly in the picture, too, a wild rose along the river when the tide is low! She was the only thing about the stove that didn't look and smell of mud. She seems immune to contamination. How like a lovely piece of Rookwood she appeared here among the drain pipe and tile!

I was still skidding, still trying to grip that greased razor-back of a road. The way Daphne sheds things, all things, a whole day like this, often tinges my natural wonder at her with a shade of fear. She seems to put on a different body and being with every different dress. I had *not* slewed into the ditch, as every other guest in the hotel had done, and though a purely negative virtue, I stood on the strength of it, just a little aloof from the herd. But when I thought of the morrow —

> Out of the night that covers me,
> Black as the Pit from pole to pole —

was as far as I could go as the captain of anything. In the thick of to-morrow's troubles I was brought back to the comfort of the moment by the mistress of the hotel at the telephone. All stove talk ceased as the telephone talk began, showing how one touch of nature makes the whole world kin.

'You say Victoria Regent has cut another toof? She has! Bless her little gizzard! Which one? Well! Well! No, you mustn't. Don't think of coming! I can wait till next Sunday. You'd be sure to slide into the ditch. It's full of 'em for ten miles back. If any more come in, they'll have to sleep on the floor. Bites, you say? She does? Well, rub 'em with alum, that'll harden 'em . . .'

I tried to get Daphne's eye, but the old boy next to her was holding forth, siding with her evidently against Iowa.

'Naw,' he was saying, 'you folks in Ioway don't know real mud. For the pure-bred, pedigree stuff you got to come to Missouri. Mud? You mentionin' mud?' — curving his neck around the stove to get at the splotched Iowan on the opposite side. 'It commenced to rain on me in Missouri, onct, just ten miles out of my town. My kaar begin to crawfish and I got woozy goin' round. We fetched up by a destrict school and nothin' else in sight on the prairie but the rain. I went in to borry the pupils to push me back to the road, but the whole herd had stampeded, teacher with 'em, leavin' their dinner pails. They seen the rain a-comin'. And nobody passed by that school for ten days.'

We looked like the circulating library of a Babylonian king. One of us, however, was extraordinarily inscribed. He was a tablet from Illinois, refaced with Iowa clay, a sort of cuneiform palimpsest. He must have been excavated from great depths. But he could talk.

'I remember times, and no shucks of a while ago, either, back in Piatt County, Illinois, when we didn't dare marry or die or even be born in the spring.'

'I want to know!' said the man from Missouri. 'Was that on account of mud?'

'Nothing else but,' answered Illinois.

'That's Missouri all over,' chimed the Ozarks.

Illinois went on: 'A neighbor of mine died in March one year, and two of us against our better judgment finally consented to carry the remains to the cemetery, three miles out of town. We hitched four horses to a carry-all,

but hardly got started before we snapped the whiffle-tree. Then we hitched 'em tandem to the tongue and pulled it out by the roots. This looked bad for the deceased. But we would put him under ground, if the thing could be done. So we hitched in again: two horses to the front ex, and two to the furr'd springs. Them horses was up to their bellies. All of a sudden the furr'd wheels struck a sunken log in the road, went up in the air and over. The hind wheels struck, went up — when the whole outfit busted in the middle, the pine box pitched furr'd, landed head first in the mud, and stood there.'

'I want to know! Whatcha do then?'

'Nothin'. It was all over before we could hitch onto it. Just sunk of itself.'

The mud had got too deep for Daphne. Conversation was in the ditch to stay. She was from Ohio, she told the company, and Ohio could hold its own with any of them for politics and national presidents, but when it came to the kind of mud they were speaking of, she guessed the Buckeye State would have to take a back seat.

Up in our room she said to me, turning the scene about the stove over in her mind: 'Some one, some day, will write the epic of this Mid-Western mud. Helen of Troy hadn't a face to compare with this for tragedy. Why, that was a scene for Dante! What did he find in Hell to match it? If I were only a writer!'

'Your great novel would be entitled "Mud." So *this* is The Better Country, is it? And you want to stay in Dunlap?'

'I didn't say Dunlap. But I do say that everything is literary material, especially mud. And where shall we find it as deep as it is here?'

This was the return of a bad symptom in Daphne, and fearing we might be in for a spell of the futility of travel, I drew her to the window to see the stars. The sky had cleared. A crisp wind was blowing. We were going to have a bright, cold dawn and *frozen* snow! Dunlap was not so bad a place. But let no one seek me in Dunlap after dawn!

The morning was more than bright and cold; it was glorious. Sorrow may endure for a night in Iowa, but it is hard to keep the United States down for a whole day. Brisk wind, brittle light, diamond dust over the streets and roofs of Dunlap, and over our road through the crowding hills, the size of the hills of Hingham — and we were off for Omaha!

It was good to be gathered to the bosom of little hills again out of the wide lap of the plains. I like to curl up close to Nature, as Tan, our cat, curls up in the wire letter-tray upon my desk. He exactly fills it, and, yielding to the woven walls, relaxes and sinks into utter sleep. So are little hills to me. I love to be embraced, to curl and feel myself enclosed, my being one continuous curve confined. I am afraid of mountains. The reaching prairies over-stimulate me. But hills like the hills of Hingham seem to love me and make me utterly at home.

Through the snow-covered hills we wound our way to Council Bluffs and across the leaden tide of the Missouri, out of Iowa into Nebraska, before a blade of grass had lost its icy edge, or any rivulet had started down a rut in our morning road. Travel isn't wholly futile, not morning travel, anyhow.

We had crossed another river, entered another land, and

another new adventure. If I didn't have Daphne to care for, I should visit the bridges of the world and cross every river. And still there would be one more to cross. We burn our bridges behind us. We cross our bridges before we come to them. Life is a river. Death is a river. Time is a river. Heaven and Hell are rivers.

> On Jordan's stormy banks I stand
> And view the landscape o'er,

whenever I stop at all to see it. Seas separate us. Latitudes and longitudes divide us; but as for me, I could cross tropics Capricorn and Cancer with less spiritual ado than the shortest foot-bridge in the world.

Over the Missouri and we were instantly in Omaha, and there was nothing climactic in that, not being Omaha Rotarians. There are differences between Council Bluffs and Omaha for those who do business in the respective cities, no doubt. But what wayfaring motorist could fail to be struck by the difference between Iowa and Nebraska? Cities differ from each other as do their lamp-posts. Character grows in the country.

Yet Omaha is impressive. My audience was disappointing, for it was exactly like a Boston audience. What did not look exactly like anything in Boston, however, was the three-million-dollar High School, for the people and by the people's money. Democracy may be a failure; perhaps the Constitution should be relegated to the limbo of outworn creeds; yet so long as Omaha continues to build such public schools, so long is there hope for America. This is more than a gesture. This is a substantial fact, and a mighty affirmation of our fathers' faith.

Nations like persons ought to be neither rich nor poor, better poor than rich. We are unevenly and dangerously rich, and if our soul is not required of us, it will be because our wealth is ever more and more returned to the public, its producers. The poorest child in Omaha owns a three-million-dollar High School. And he had, when I was there, a three-million-dollar principal to help him run it. The child has earned it. He needs it. And when every child in the country has one like it, and when every child in the country attends it, then we shall have demonstrated democracy, and all but proved it.

There was no snow in Omaha, and none on the Tulsa Trail the next morning, which shows the influence of rivers. We pulled out of Omaha early, Daphne aiding and abetting, the memory of Dunlap also doing its share. Not an Omaha policeman was at his traffic post as we struck the great north-and-south trail for Topeka, one hundred and seventy-*six* miles away. I am careful to stress the last *six* miles.

The atmosphere seemed spongy. Another saturated sky hung heavily over us. Something was again brewing, but just what we did not know, having by this time run quite beyond our depths in weather. Daphne was sure of silver linings. We were too far west for my almanac. And having to lecture that night in Topeka, I was under a more than ordinary cloud. Thank Heaven, this was my last one until I reached California. The car, too, behaved wretchedly, lagging along, in spite of the excellent road, as if its eastern mixture were in need of some western change.

Of course it was I who was lagging, the machine being a

mere projection of the driving mind. I was anxious and trying to hurry, but I was also aware that the gradual change which had been taking place in the landscape from east to west was here of a sudden almost complete. We had come up to the bank of the river Platte, a new species of stream to me, with the Middle West behind us, and the Far West lying all around. I stopped and tried to analyze the new face of things. There was too much of it. I could see the strange face, but I could not describe the features, not even the river which gave character to the great countenance. I only knew that no eddy under the toll bridge had a familiar swirl to me, no bit of floatage that I had ever drifted with, that no 'sawyer' in the Weymouth or the Charles had ever ripped so turbid a current or with such a crazy vigor as here.

Slowing up, we came to a stop on the river and lingered for a moment by the willowed bank of an elder Platte whose course henceforth is in song and story. How wild a scene lay about as we brought back the past! Buffaloes, red men, white men along both banks of the wide, flat, coffee-colored stream! But where now was the covered wagon, the pony express, the overland stage? Here, with the Oregon Trailers, had passed some of Daphne's own people, and so short a while ago that one of the hardy band, Ezra Meeker, is still alive and trailing! If Daphne had left off for a moment reminding me of how far we were from Topeka, it would all have come back to me — the creaking caravan, the tepees on the flats, the thunder of wild hoofs upon the prairie, and the whoops of hunters on the flanks of the shaggy herds.

We had entered a new world, and I was fain, as the

poets say, to pitch by the river and camp for at least one day with the pioneers. Here were the lights and the bare boards of the stage and much of the scenery, but the actors in the stirring drama, so swiftly borne away!

At the farther end of the bridge over the Platte I made another moment's halt to watch three young eagles and a flock of burning cardinals in a bunch of aspens. Here were crows, too, and flickers, and overhead a fleet of wheeling buzzards — all of them familiar birds, out of the skies of my Jersey childhood, as out of the books of the same childhood were the other, more familiar Indians, buffaloes, lodges, and ox teams winding across the plains.

We did encounter herds along here, of bald-faced Herefords, the first big herds thus far to block our road. They did not greatly delay us. It was interesting to see their riders deftly cut the waving white faces that we might pass through dry shod, not to say, dusty. Then to turn back and watch the walls flow together again in a solid sea of red! But this was beef, and tame. Traveling to the shambles the meek-eyed, machine-made creatures, by no stretch of my imagination, could be used in the play for buffaloes. They were all of a pattern, standardized as to weight and shape and color, inspected, selected, packed, and stamped at the bullock factory, without a touch of the wild upon them or any sign of the 'purple sage.' They chaffed and jostled each other as we forced them hard out against the wire fences, and when they had passed there lay before us a road like a gray ribbon of crêpe. The chiseling hoofs had obliterated the ruts, leveled the crown, and left an even, stippled trail in which no human track or sign was seen, except here and there in the chopped dust the smooth print of a pony's iron shoe.

One hundred and seventy-six miles make a reasonable day's run on the Tulsa Trail and its détours in December, especially if you must finish in time to dress for dinner and an evening engagement. We made one seriously wrong turn, getting off on an unhappy road once used by the migrating buffaloes, coming back to the paved and proper way a few miles short of the city at a spot in a ravine where a bridge was being built up from what appeared to be bedrock. Perhaps there is no such rock in that section of Kansas, though the bottom of this ravine was certainly very deep down.

Chaos reigned and fast approaching night in this grewsome hole. Everything — wagons, tools, heaps of clay — had been left in wild confusion, as if the road gang, like the pupils in the Missouri school, had seen the coming of the rain, or had been at work when the four-thirty whistle blew. We locked our wheels and slid. It was an all but perpendicular cut to the bottom, which we hit softly just as it began to rain.

The wheels began to spin. The car began to slither. Daphne began to tell me that she had seen this coming all day long, but I wouldn't hurry. We might have reached here before they had dug the hole so deep, she argued, if I hadn't been determined to explore the branch roads and détours. She is so fatally right!

I could see the edge of the concrete road above us, broken off like a cake of ice. What a life! I gave the car all the power it had. Power wasn't the thing needed. It was prayer. The wheels went round fast enough, but not up. Only a pull from above could lift us to the brink of the concrete and drag us over. Daphne may have prayed,

though it is unlikely under the circumstances. I had my hands full as it was. We got out, not by my virtue, not by Daphne's either, in spite of her claims, but by virtue built by some unknown workman into the soul of the car.

'You can thank me,' was what Daphne actually said, as we clambered out upon the hard road. And I did thank her. I thanked everything up to the blotted stars. One minute more of rain in that slough and we should have stayed right there for the night. For there was not a house in sight, nor a pair of mules in all of the weltering void.

That night it rained in Kansas. And the Devil walks when it rains at night in Kansas. A whole generation on concrete must pass before the people will live down this superstition of the Devil and the rain. If Daphne's epic poet is to immortalize the mud of the West, he could find his closing canto in Kansas, but he must come quickly. The synthetic cement mixer will shortly do for the Grendel of the oozy den out of which we had so hardly escaped.

CHAPTER X

THE SANTA FE TRAIL

The rain continued until noon the next day. Friends had taken us in, and for breakfast with us invited the Reverend and Mrs. Charles M. Sheldon, together with a League of Nations missionary, a strange, gentle dreamer, wandering through the world with what was left of his life and fortune seeking to realize a cosmic peace.

It was near noon when the sun broke out in rifts and the talk broke off about the table; and neither of us remembers what we had for breakfast, or whether we had any breakfast. Daphne said it was tremendously exciting to listen to a pair of public speakers firing their lectures at each other across a breakfast table. She could have stood it still longer, she said, were we not due in Los Angeles to meet the seven-forty train. Both she and Mrs. Sheldon thanked us for the entertainment. Daphne said it might have been more interesting to the ladies had either one of them been given a single chance. But I told Mrs. Sheldon that if Daphne actually had waited for a chance to speak it was the first time in at least thirty years.

No, it was Daphne and Dr. Sheldon who really bore the brunt of the lively battle. I wedged in now and then with a comment, but spent most of my time admiring the fireworks. I wondered, too, if everybody in Kansas talked about the breakfast table until noon every day it rains. The fancy charmed me. How quickly the literary center of the country would shift from Indiana to Kansas if that

were so; and what a pity it would be to hasten the feet but slow down the tongue of Kansas with macadam and concrete!

The Topeka Motor Club cautioned us against further travel down the Tulsa Trail on account of the rain; but if we must go, to go by way of the Gold Band Route toward Denver as far as Salina, and there drop down to the National Old Trails, picking up that route at McPherson.

Splashing away from Topeka in an April mixture of shower and sun, our next 'engagement' with our own children at the Los Angeles railroad station, we broke out our canvas (if I may) and set sail on an argent sea. The road was surfaced with vivid yellow gravel, and covered with vivid yellow puddles. The feel of the grit under the tires set the car to careening. I could scarcely hold her down. The ochreous spray washed clean over the pilot house. It gilded and glorified us. We might have been leaving Colchis, instead of staid Topeka, and bearing with us the precious Golden Fleece.

Something more precious we were bearing with us out of Topeka. The lectures were done. Dress suits and dinners were done. My personal responsibility for the educational system of America was done. We were starting five hours late — and all of that was done! No more early or late! What a grand and glorious feeling! The carmine spot was flaming in Daphne's cheek. The wild averted light blazed in her eye. She was trying to shut her mouth as tight as Mr. Bryan's, but the lips would curve and part and let the panting excitement out. For whose was this freedom?

We were nearing Fort Riley when the sun dropped below the wrack of December clouds and stood over on

the earth in such a tableau of splendor that Fort Riley and the Gate of Heaven are still distressingly confused in our minds. Something must be allowed for the stretch of paved road running east and west out of Fort Riley. Off came my hat as the flag went by. And when did the colors ever look more beautiful! A mighty and a goodly land is ours. Try it by motor if your sight is weak and your faith is low. Forts I don't like. And this one seemed foolish off here in the middle of nowhere, with its military road running east nowhere, and running west nowhere, just as militarism has ever, and must ever, run, as a means of national defense. It was out of the sunset that the Gate of Heaven got into the picture.

So we rested that night in Junction City, seventy-five miles beyond Topeka. Reckoned in miles that run was a failure. But count your escapes from death, your hilltop views, dips into valleys, and creeks and rivers crossed, vast stretches without habitations, strange contours of landscape, new concaves of sky — count these and the scanty miles are extended out of measure. And are true distances marked off with figures on a dial by some unseeing gear in the bowels of the car?

Had we been really free we should not have stopped at Junction City, nor turned south at Salina, but kept straight out through the brown sterile hills here along the Kansas River toward Hays, into the greatest wheat country that I have ever seen. We should have run through square miles of it, as green as a lawn under the winter rains, but hardly a field of corn. This is the land of the tumbling 'Rooshian thistle,' too (*salsola*), that brown shrubby plant piled up against the prairie fences

which you see from the car windows as you pass. It is a pernicious thing, about the shape and size of a bushel basket ordinarily, but some specimens reach a diameter of ten to twelve feet. That, however, is nothing. It is the *tumbling* that I would have motored on to Hays to see. For during this season the skeletal thing twists off its short stem, and comes loping over the prairie with the ceaseless winds, a wolf of a weed, the very spirit of the dun and treeless plains.

We did stop in Junction City, and we did turn south at Salina the next day, feeling, notwithstanding our new freedom, the loss of yesterday's miles. I must round up a bunch of about one hundred and fifty of them that had stampeded during the rain. Daphne had the journey figured to the last mile, each day of it. December 12 was short of its quota. 'Deposit me,' she said, as if saying it were doing it, 'at Dodge City for dinner to-night, and we will count some of the two hundred and fifty "as and if issued and received" on yesterday's account.'

That sounded like the bank. Daphne is not all business; yet seven-forty in the morning is exacting anywhere, especially if it is in Los Angeles and you are in Junction City, Kansas. At six o'clock that night I deposited her, whole of heart, but much shattered in other parts, at a dining-table in Dodge City. I had rounded up a few of the runaway miles. My neck, knees, and knuckles were terribly kinked, and the rest of me bumped and lumpy from the drying ruts. I must have mentioned it as I lifted her out at the hotel, for she asked me quietly, 'Well, what did you expect?'

And what did I expect? I simply can't complain to

Daphne. She doesn't understand the language of complaint. We had motored through sunshine all day, done two hundred and fifty-six miles, had struck the Santa Fe Trail, were here at the gateway of the Southwest, and had seen the real Kansas prairie, the largest reach of landscape our eyes had ever beheld. What did I expect!

All of the afternoon the land had rolled away from us in every quarter out against the blue. Not even at sea (the big ship is so crowded to you) had I ever felt so like a mote as here. I could see the car hurrying up hill and down like a tiny black ant, while under heaven turned the big earth about its steady pole. The dwarfing effect of the space about us was at first almost numbing. We had no measure for this new distance, no diagram of experience for this panoramic perspective. Haystacks, ranch houses, windmills — everything human lay squat on the skyline, flat on its belly, badger-like, and only half emerged from its burrow. There was nothing remotely approaching this in Hingham. We shaded our eyes and gazed with narrowed lids and bodies strained to *see* the overreach, but could not see. It was something that we could only feel. During the afternoon, since leaving Ellinwood, we had again and again come into the presence of the slow, silent Arkansas. We had passed Pawnee Rock. Leaving the great river at Kinsley, we swung straight across country for Dodge City, spaciously and manifoldly attended.

At Dodge City we swam fairly into the California current. Two loaded cars stood nosing the curb in front of the hotel, and in the many coats of mud on the back of the Missouri car a prophetic finger had written, 'California for Christmas' — to which sentiment the car

from Massachusetts, turning into its stall against the curb, whinnied absolute agreement. It could have rubbed noses with that Missouri Ford. Both of the loaded cars were headed for California, no doubt, and perhaps traveling together, and it was a cheering thought

That I was of hir felawshipe anon.

There was more felawshipe within. The old hotel was full of California pilgrims; and they kept coming. How like other pilgrims at another inn they seemed! Southwark is a brave way off from Dodge City, but the nine and twenty in the 'compaignye' at The Tabard that April night differed strangely little in spirit from the sixteen of us at The O'Neal this night in December. They were on the road to Canterbury, we to California; but all of us were pilgrims, with 'corage' more or less devout, to some holy shrine.

They had gathered

. . . from every shirës endé
Of Engelond;

we from pretty much about the United States — from New Jersey, New York, Iowa, Washington, Missouri, Illinois, and Hingham. They had come by horseback; we by motor car. They were doing fifteen miles a day, by way of Dartford, Rochester, and Ospringe; we nearly two hundred and fifty a day, by way of La Junta, Santa Fe, Holbrook, Needles, San Bernardino, and Los Angeles — to the shrine of Santa Barbara for Daphne and me. The accidents of time and place and mode of travel are vastly different; but here along the Arkansas as there beside the Thames, now with our powerful motors as then with the

Plowman's heavy-footed mare, in December, no less than in budding April,

> . . . longen folk to goon on pilgrimages.

For

> Infinite been the sorwes and the teres
> Of oldë folk, and folk of terdre yeres;

and call it Canterbury, or California, or The Better Country, we are all thither bound.

> This world nis but a thurghfare ful of wo
> And we ben pilgrimes, passinge to and fro.

We were moving faster than 'a litel more than pas,' the gait of Chaucer and his friends. Perhaps we were seeing as much along the way. If, on the other hand, we were not listening to so much of song and story, it was for no lack of romantic history along the Trail. For upwards of forty years nothing but adventure traveled here. From 1806, when Captain Zebulon Pike made his first expedition up the Arkansas to open a trade route into New Mexico, down to 1868, the year Custer took Satanta, the fighting chief of the Kiowas, and put an end to the raids of the tribes of the plains, the Santa Fe Trail had more than its share of story.

Since leaving Iowa we had seen no snow except in high places toward the close of the run into Dodge City. We had not disembarked at the hotel, however, when two cars pulled in from the west, with tops and running-boards snow-covered, forecasting a different day to-morrow. 'Let's not shovel any of it to-night,' said Daphne. 'I want

to see who all of these queer people are inside. *Who* are they, anyway, that motor about the country this season of the year?'

If ever the joke could be made to stick to Daphne, it was on her here, for the man from Kansas City, watching me sign 'Massachusetts' on the register, turned to Daphne, exclaiming, 'Why, you folks must be stark crazy traipsing away out here this season of the year!' And Daphne just laughed at him, and shook hands on it, declaring that she found travelers, and people generally, had very much of the same mind.

And just now in this country it is a motor mind. Daphne and I were nothing different from the herd. Some idea of our motoring multitudes can be imagined from the experience of a friend of mine on his way to the Yellowstone National Park. He came early into an empty motor camp one afternoon, and, not feeling well, pitched his tent and went to bed. On awakening in the morning he found that seven hundred automobiles had parked about him, and tents by the hundreds, and hundreds of breakfasts under way.

Take a road map of the country, or, better, a large-scale map covering, say, Nebraska and Colorado, and count the tiny black triangles marking the sites of the free automobile camps. The pilgrim shrines of the Middle Ages, when wayfaring life was religion and the repair of roads was prayer and alms, were as nothing for numbers when compared with the camps of our automobile pilgrims.

A mechanical age, and we the victims of our own machines, yet what a human lot they were that the December night had rounded up at the inn in Dodge City!

Separate us from our cars, corral us in the tavern, and we are neither Packards, nor Franklins, nor Fords at the end of the run, though mostly Fords upon the run, but straight story and sermon and song.

CHAPTER XI

MODERN PILGRIMS

Dodge City, while still inhabited, is mostly a literary ruin, to be restored some day, and built into an eternal city by a mortal pen. There are plenty of live people living in Dodge City, but there are more and livelier dead ones. Nor are they all red men, the Kiowas, Comanches, Pawnees, and Arapahoes of the plains. At the time Custer was writing 'Finis' to Book I of the Dodge City Story, Luke Short, 'Doc' Holiday, and Bat Masterson in the romantic seventies, were starting Book II, which, by comparison for situation and dramatic climax, makes the massacres of the Indians read like Homer's catalogue of ships.

I didn't know what complexion it would wear for Daphne, but to me this place looked like the country we were seeking. What a novel I might dig up here! And while Daphne was moving about, chatting with the travelers, I fell to musing upon the scenes which used to be staged in this same barroom, and not so very long ago. Dodge City was the frontier in the seventies. The railroad ended here, and law and order before it reached here. This was the hub of the wheel to the great cattle country lying south and west, a cowboy town, wide open and going very fast. I sighed to think of the shootings-up my old friend, George Tower Buffum, had survived in Dodge City, when he was a mining-candle agent, and used to start west from here by overland stage. Luke Short was the only star in

that bloody southwest firmament to fade, so to speak, at dawn. He died in bed, the one 'notched' gunman of Dodge City to pass on like a Christian.

Daphne and I had hit the Santa Fe Trail forty years too late! The frontier had pulled out of Dodge City for somewhere farther west. We must overtake it, and we determined to push on early the next morning, for it might have stopped, who knows, at La Junta. Had Fate got the drop on us, I wondered? On me, possibly; but nothing had yet been able to hold up Daphne. She's a born highwayman. Everybody in that old barroom had to stick up his hands and deliver his story to her. And what a human haul she made!

Every car had brought in its own literary freight, the one registered from New York with an 'old party' and a vivid young wife. It was a honeymoon trip. Daphne didn't have to tell me that. Anybody could see that as a wife she couldn't have been longer on the road than from New York State to Kansas. But the jaunts the 'old party' himself and his battered car had been on ere this were more than I could reckon. Daphne said the jaunt he had before him now was the most dreadful to contemplate, and that there ought to be law. I thought so too; though it was high time to junk both the old fool and his car; and he had picked a mighty pretty wrecker. Daphne seemed inclined to softness toward the 'stripped-down,' second-hand chassis of a lover; but when I forced her to answer what *she* would do with such an outfit, she whispered, 'Stall him and elope with you.'

Out of Walla Walla by a circuitous and obscure route through New England the Washington State car had

brought in a very much-married couple. They might make good literature, but they made exceptionally poor company. I said that they had been having motor trouble that day. Daphne said it was marital trouble, and of a good many days' standing. Studying the situation a little further, I was inclined to agree with Daphne, and told her that, in my opinion, any man was justified in anything short of murder when the wife of his bosom took to pants. And any woman, she retorted, was justified in murder when the husband of her bosom took to such language; that if one word above all others was hateful to her it was "pants!" But I stubbornly contended that that was the only word in the language which would describe them when a woman wore them.

She was dressed for trouble — in khaki breeches (out of deference to Daphne), heavy flannel shirt of the same dye, and sleek, silk stockings on what had been a very pretty leg, no doubt, except for the heavy hunting boot. Clothes don't make a man, but stockings, and a few other scraps, do the present-day woman. I maintain that a woman ought to try at all times to look the part, and if she isn't pretty, to put on whatever she lacks. Breeches might save them from prowling, predatory men, but not from assault and battery by their husbands. What was the name of the Walla Walla pair, I asked Daphne; and she said it was Sourdough, at least that was what she made out of the hotel register.

Had they written anything else on the register, I asked Daphne, gossipy details, or the like? No, she said, they didn't need to. Anybody could tell that they had been married these fifteen childless years; that she had played

bridge all fifteen of them; and that he had never played at anything on account of business, though he had a perfect poker face; that they had been motoring East on a vacation, visiting *her* people, staying on and on at *her* insistence — until this was the rotten mess of weather that *she* had gotten them into, as *always* happens when you let a fool woman have her way.

'I can tell you a lot more about them if you wish me to,' she went on.

'Nuff said, Daphne. I appreciate the situation fully. The poor devil has my sympathy.'

'You're very acute, my dear,' she replied, covering me with a disquieting Mona Lisa smile. 'But my sympathies are with Mrs. Sourdough.'

The stuffy pair occupied opposite ends of a long settee, a gap between them that no spark of love could ever jump. I asked Daphne if she didn't think she might mediate between them, fix things up, and bring them together, possibly. If it were only the domestic affairs of China, she would gladly undertake the task, she answered me; however, if I would try it with Mrs. Sourdough, she would see what she could do with Mr. Sourdough. But I declined, telling Daphne I thought we had better settle some old scores of our own before butting into those of the Sourdoughs. 'But think of the fun of making up,' she whispered with another Mona Lisa twist to her lips; then added cryptically, 'Let's not despise our differences.'

The man of the Missouri car labeled 'California for Christmas' came up and introduced himself as an auctioneer from Kansas City. Daphne gasped, and afterward confided to me that she had been speaking with him earlier,

and had taken it for granted that he was an orthodox preacher. 'I wasn't so far afield, though, was I?' with a look at me intended to bring back my own ministerial days. 'They both use the same selling methods, and it's mostly bankrupt and second-hand goods they're knocking down.'

The auctioneer was not asking for bids to-night, unless it was for Daphne's sympathy; and it doesn't take the eagle eye of an auctioneer to see that she could be sold almost anything in that line. I listened while he poured out to Daphne the account of his wife and sick son in the Sierra Madres whom he hadn't seen for two years; how he had sold out his business and home in Kansas, and, turning everything into cash, had bought a car, which he would sell in California for more than it cost him, and so make a penny besides saving his fare; how he hated to make the long trip this season of the year alone, and so put an advertisement in the newspapers, saying that on December 9 he would be in such-and-such a make of car, on such-and-such a street corner in Kansas City, to start at such-and-such an hour for California, and if anybody, planning to make the same trip by motor, would join him there, he would be glad for the company. The back of his car would read: 'CALIFORNIA FOR CHRISTMAS.'

'Did anybody show up?' asked Daphne.

'Yes — there he is, that youngish man and his boy,' pointing out a Mr. Humphrey, and his sixteen-year-old son, with whom Daphne and I had already spoken. 'He's a linseed-oil and lead salesman, and an honest-to-God gentleman. His boy isn't sick like mine. But he has no wife like mine out there waiting for him.'

Not far out of Dodge City a car of high descent, now far

descended, had passed us, carrying three waving young mechanics. Here the three musketeers turned up after supper, also on their way to The Better Country, and having the time of their lives doing the trip. If anybody in that company was destined to succeed on his high emprise it was that trio. Their car was a roadside legacy. What it lacked in parts the three made good in spirit and ingenuity; and the stunt was to bring her into California with a record for breaks and missing parts. But there was a better man at that on the road who beat them to it, though he hadn't entered the race, to my knowledge, until we reached Holbrook, many parasangs farther on.

It was a joy to know the three young fellows were ahead of us and not coming up behind. They drove like Jehu when they did drive. When they rested by the road patching up the 'ole boat,' they had a picnic, shouting and waving and grinning as we shied by, and promising themselves that we should see them when the lamps were lit. And usually we did see them, muddy and smootchy and smiling. But when we didn't, we knew they were still smiling somewhere back along the trail. I envied them their skills and their smiles, for our 'boat' was not as low laden as it might have been with such cargo. 'Everything hath divers faces, sundry biases, and several lusters,' saith an old philosopher. But don't try to tell me, Cicero, that five and fifty hath so many faces, so many biases, so many and so bright lusters as five and twenty!

Those three lads finished strong. They met their match, however, at Holbrook, Arizona. For ability to handle a handicapped car the fellow who got into the run at Holbrook deserved the wreath he wore. It happened that I

entered the race against the three lads at Holbrook, though only as a 'pacer' to their rival, not knowing this until I reached California, where I read the facts in print. I remember a decent-looking chap at Holbrook asking me to lend him thirty cents to buy a gallon of gas so that he could get on to the next town. I knew he was a motor tramp, and I hated to give him thirty cents; it was against all of my sociological training. But I hated to feel like thirty cents all day, for turning him down, being of the sort who are by nature compelled to entertain angels unawares. So I handed him over a round, unplugged half-dollar, thinking it better to bask a little in my charity than to break off the brittle end of the courtesy, as Emerson puts it, and hold that short end forever in my hand.

The fellow thanked me, and remarked, rather absently, that he had been towed into Holbrook, and he guessed he might have to be towed out, as no garage man here seemed to know how to make his machine go. But my contribution for gas was all he asked of me; and I passed out of the story. On getting into California, however, I found the papers laughing over the tale of this man and his tub, how he had been stalled back in Missouri, where a sympathetic brother of the road gave him a tow. He was dropped, but, unable to start his engine, was taken in tow by a second man, who eventually left him hitched to the rear end of a third towing car. Thus he traveled for about seventeen hundred miles, and was within a day's run of Los Angeles when once more the tender mercies of the open road laid hold upon him for a tow. But the rope broke, and when the tow-man came back for a second hitch, he chanced to lift the hood of the helpless car and found it had no engine in

it. And the papers said this last fellow roundly beat the beggar up.

But I am way ahead of the journey, and the company of us that night in Dodge City. Of course they kept more or less with us from this point on, so that no extended account of them is necessary now. Daphne did have another short talk with 'the honest-to-God gentleman,' the linseed-oil salesman, and father of the sixteen-year-old boy, and pronounced him 'a very perfit gentle knight.' The things that fathers and sons, stark strangers, will confidentially tell Daphne makes life for her a traveling confessional. Men in most moods, not women, are what John Ridd would call the weaker vessels.

Off in a corner of the room, furtively watching the rest of us, sat a pathetic, timorous group, as silent as if they had been gagged. The cadaverous man was all of thirty, so long and thin that I could only think of the walking-stick insect every time he would slowly shift a leg or an arm. His wife (Daphne said conversation with them was shamefully like a cross-questioning at court, but she knew they were listening their starved ears off) was as pathetically short as he was long. There was no hectic spot in her cheek as there was in his, nor brightness to her eye which the touch of fever gave to his; but there was a dull hopelessness, darkly lighted with a gleam of something sullen and hating, which spoke of deeper, longer misery than the poor fellow beside her knew or would ever know. The third member of the silent group was their little boy about six years old.

All over the room, talking to every one, except to the three in the silent corner, who were his son and daughter-

in-law and grandson, moved a husky, loud-voiced man for whom Daphne conceived a violent, feminine aversion. He wore a great fur coat, heavy gauntlet mittens of fur, and a fur cap.

He was dressed for cold weather; but Daphne chilled him. She can blow hotter and colder than a Massachusetts March. I didn't take to the fellow myself, he was so sure of himself, so well fed, and bent on running the party. Daphne said he was a contractor and small politician; but it was very evident to me that he was not used to delivering the female vote. Still we were all on the road together, and it takes all kinds to make a party, I told Daphne.

'No,' she said, 'it doesn't take a single one like that to make my party. I like people, all kinds of people, except this kind. He hasn't spoken to those forlorn things tonight. He didn't eat with them, but went over to the Chinaman's alone across the street. He had all he could eat, too. But look at his T.B. son over there! Did you ever see a more browbeaten, starved, cowed, bewildered being than that poor fellow! But let the big brute keep an eye on his smouldering daughter-in-law.'

'How come, now, Daphne, where'd you get this line of stuff?'

'It isn't stuff. I've talked with them. They're nice, gentle people; sick, too, the young man is, and doomed. And this unnatural father is taking them in a perfectly terrible car over the road this time of year, to leave them for California to look out for!'

A hectic spot had kindled on each of Daphne's cheeks from a fever burning in the volcanic center of her. Happily the linseed-oil man came up at this instant and our con-

versation turned upon the weather prospects and our route for to-morrow, thus saving Daphne from internal combustion.

'I like the looks of your wholesome boy, Mr. Humphrey,' Daphne said as we were leaving the room. 'I hoped to have a little talk with him. Did he go to bed early?'

'No, he went to have a look at the town and hasn't come in yet. I hope you will talk with him, say, to-morrow night, if we all get into La Junta. I would appreciate it very deeply'; something wistful, almost pleading in the man's voice, which was met by something strong and tender in Daphne's honest eyes.

A very herd of a wind was galloping through the town. Before going up to my room I took a short turn about the dark, deserted streets, for a prairie wind is as different from a sea wind as a prairie town is from a seaport town or a fishing village along shore. A greater contrast to Hingham could hardly be found in Timbuktu. Of course my face was averted, my back bent before the wind, and I must see things bent and averted. So I did. Dodge City is still backed up against that windy prairie, bent and averted, hugging the earth, as dwarf trees flatten and hold hard at timberline.

CHAPTER XII

THE TOP OF THE WORLD

We had settled the weather among us before retiring, discussed the road and the length of the run for to-morrow, agreed upon La Junta for our next party, and went our ways, determined, as for Daphne and me, to be the first out of Dodge City in the morning.

But the Sourdoughs were the early birds. They had left their car parked at the curb overnight. I had put mine in a near-by garage, and there it stayed until the proprietor had finished his breakfast and the half of his morning toothpick. Poor Daphne, always doting on the dawn, saw it bud and blossom into full-blown day before our start.

I have seen a more golden dawn and cheerfuller mornings. I think, up to that time, I had never felt a colder wind, nor a steadier, more determined one. I tucked Daphne in out of it, slammed the heavy door and heard it shut, all over, as a well-built door will do, and hurrying around back for a glance at the gasoline gauge, came up to my door where the long, lank son of the unnatural father was standing, gazing rapt at our car.

His wife and child, wrapped in bedquilts, were forced in among the luggage of a wretched touring car which had been at the curb all night. Its broken curtains were tied down with string at which the wind was tugging. They would be in shreds the minute the car came into the teeth of the gale on the open prairie. And all day long the three miserable things on that back seat must face the bitter

miles — two hundred and twenty-four of them to reach La Junta!

They survived them, but I have not, not yet. Perhaps I shall never come to La Junta, never cease to shiver from that day's cold. For there stood my own car, closed and warm, and empty except for its load of freight. There was no room in the car, as once there was no room in a certain inn. I should have tossed the freight to the wolfish winds.

> O, wert thou in the cauld blast,
> On yonder lea, on yonder lea;
> My plaidie to the angry airt,
> I'd shelter thee, I'd shelter thee.

I would, but I didn't, and I shall never be warm when the wind blows now. I did say, 'Good morning'! Made some inane remark about the bitterness of the wind, and, reaching out to grab the door, heard the slat-sided, hollow-chested fellow mutter, as he looked inside,

'Oh, boy! But she's the baby!'

And I was on my way to The Better Country! That day I had a chance of finding it, but left my chance shivering there in the wind by the curb in Dodge City. But, as Daphne said, we couldn't tote along everybody. We couldn't break up family parties, nor bear everybody's natural burden, nor crowd another thing into the car. And of course we couldn't. Besides, I had my natural burden in Daphne; and she had more than hers in me. Neither of us had chosen the primrose path exactly; and the way from Dodge City to La Junta was anything but that.

For a clear morning that one out of Dodge City was the wildest I have ever faced. It was tempestuous, tremendous, glorious! And we were alone with it, just Daphne and

myself. La Junta was two hundred and twenty-four miles away. Not a mile too far! The day had scarcely started, yet it couldn't last long enough. We were side by side within the closed car and this vast enclosing space, but we were not close enough. Little had we dreamed of looking for The Better Country up here on this bleak, windblown Kansas prairie. What was it, however, that we had entered, or were now approaching? Sun-swept, snow-swept, gale-swept curved an earth before us that fitted close into the blue concave of the sky. We could reach up and touch the azure. It seemed as if the car might little more than squeeze between the high-sprung road and the bending arch of blue.

Anyhow, I was suddenly free from conscience, composed in spirit as I have seldom been, and alive with delight. That I didn't have to speak in La Junta had something to do with it. This was the open road, not a passage to La Junta, and La Junta was not an audience, but just a shelter for the night. To go. To arrive. To have no audience but Daphne. To sleep. To wake. To go on for another day, and still with Daphne, only myself and Daphne. We had never done the like before. Since the world began I had had a congregation, or a class of students, or an audience, or a reading public before me, with Daphne off in the corner of it. I, of course, was the whole front of it, and very much aware of it, and (Daphne says) very much addicted to it.

Maybe so. But

> Oh, for a lodge in some vast wilderness,
> Some boundless contiguity of shade!

had often been my cry, whether Daphne had ever heard me

utter it or not. And here it was, a car, to be sure, for the lodge, and a boundless contiguity of wind and snow and blazing light instead of shade.

'Let's not utter a word all day,' I suggested as we left the town, and, taking our bearings from the blue-and-white road sign of the Automobile Club of Southern California, stood westward against the very coasts of heaven. 'Let's not talk. Let's just be. I won't think of a thing if you won't. I won't mention it if I do think of it, provided you won't.'

'All right,' she said. 'We'll neither think, nor talk, just be — unless you bump-p-p-p-p us-ssss like *that!* I'll talk every time you bump me. Remember that.'

I did strike a bad one that time, and it shunted me deep into a snowbank somewhat off the road. Backing out, I got into the ruts again and started on, saying nothing, or next to nothing, everything considered. As the sun climbed higher and the light spread, we became aware of a new space experience. Distance worked out away from us until we were engulfed, and, though moving, we lost the sense of motion forward and of power in the car, so utterly boundless were all of the 'contiguities' of the scene. And such a wind as smote us! Such blazing, freezing sunlight as blinded us! Such smoking snow! We crawled along the crest of an illimitable universe that yielded us plenty of action, but no feeling of progress, no consciousness of time.

Farther back I said that one did not strike one's cross-country stride much before Chicago. With me it was not until I topped the world on these hurricane-swept miles of Kansas that the wheels of my being synchronized perfectly with the wheels of my going, all that was within me mesh-

ing with all that was without, my spirit sliding from first to second, from second into high and back into reverse without a grabbing of the clutch or any clashing of the gears.

'What is it?' she asked. 'What are you smiling about?'

'I'm not smiling, Daphne. Just being aware' — as the car lurched into a washout hidden under the snow. Daphne came down from the roof, quite a bit askew, but not seriously hurt, except in feelings, and a somewhat loosened tongue. The jolt caught mine between the upper and the nether millstones and put it temporarily out of commission. It's a wise tongue that knows when to bite itself.

The road was rather rough along here. I could steady myself on the wheel, but Daphne had nothing except a handful of strip-maps to hold on to, and the consequence was she got enough kick out of the road to pass some of it on to me. She declared I would snap every spring. But the springs, I told her, on this car were one of its selling points. You simply couldn't break these springs. A silly boast, she said; a menace to life and limb; and that she would never consent to my getting another car of this make unless they would put on especially designed springs that were fully guaranteed to break.

Silence being the order of the day, I drove along carefully, for we were now in deep snow, saying nothing, but being very much aware of a new freedom — from the fret of delay; from irritation over Daphne's unpreparedness for hidden holes in the road; from anxiety over my own unpreparedness, especially for a lecture. How often I had gone to my classroom saying to my good Scotch colleague, 'You pray for me, Sandy, and I'll do the like for you.' Some-

times his prayers worked. But they never prevented worry. I was past that to-day. Daphne, who had had to make a life study of how to worry me, would have here had no 'control.' I was invincible. Nothing could strike me out. We could easily freeze if stalled out here — the easiest of all deaths to die. Let come what must come. But let me publish to the wild winds on this prairie that I did not have to be in La Junta at six o'clock, or at eight o'clock, or at any o'clock; for I was free — free as the winds and as wild!

Drifts and holes and miles in the road? If they were all in the road, then they were all in the day's run, and I was all in the day's run — and so was Daphne. And wasn't this, possibly, the very thing we had come out from Hingham to find? We might this moment be coming into The Better Country!

'Daphne!' I cried above the roar of the wind, as the idea hit me. But she only put her finger to her lips, in sign of our agreement. Very well. If this *were* The Country, she would discover it for herself. I would wait and watch it unfold about us.

How good the flannel shirt felt about my neck! It was a new shirt, and a thick one, with a little tow, evidently, or hemp mixed in with the hair of the collar. But I was not born to be hanged, my mother said, nor to be scratched unduly this day by oakum or whatever it is they make flannel shirts out of, these prosperous times, besides the tariff. Yesterday's stubble was on my face, too, for I had actually slipped away from Dodge City and Daphne without shaving. I rubbed it and said nothing. But I thought: If it were not for Daphne, I would never, never shave

again. I might never even wash any more. Certainly I would never put on starched shirts any more.

Back of me among the luggage was such a shirt, the breastwork I had stood behind in Topeka. From the shelter of its studded plates I had fired my chesty stuff at those shot-to-pieces teachers. Poor things, I pray them to forgive me as they have forgotten me. Were there teachers in The Better Country, I wondered? Not one! Not one! And no boiled shirts either. I had split and shed that false front in the tonneau as a cicada sheds its skin. Only the cicada becomes strident after that, whereas I intended forever to subside.

I had talked a good deal for one who had so little to say. I had been collared and tied and timed, and trained to say what is conventionally true, and to behave mannerly at every sort of public table, and at home, as far as I was able. I would break training now. If there was a moral order in the universe I would keep hands off. The Best Minds at Washington, the buying and selling of seats in the Senate, Teapot Dome and its pipe-line to the President's cabinet — all of this I would forget. I would never utter another epoch-making word to anybody, nor consult another time-table, nor own another alarm clock, nor care what day of the week it is, what hour of the day, nor try to remember the number of the street nor the nature of the crowd, whether Rotarian, Kiwanian, or just a herd of tame Lions. And with this I knew that at last I had actually left Hingham and was even now entering, or about to enter, that City which hath foundations, that Better Country of whose reality I had been persuaded, and toward which, a stranger and a pilgrim, I had been always on the road.

'Daphne!' I cried, 'we're there! This is the place!'

'Doesn't look to me like it' — not lifting her eyes from her study of the maps.

'Listen, Daphne!' But instead she stuffed her fingers in her ears. One of the rear chains began to grab the mudguard. We slewed and plunged across the road, Daphne's fingers still in her ears, and mine, in that Better Country, gripping the snow shovel, the old Hingham shovel, but in a better snow and in a better wind than ever struck the Hills of Hingham.

I never knew that wind could blow like this; that ice could blaze; that snow could burn and set its own drifted world aflame. I didn't know that any little human soul could tackle a snow-banked prairie in Kansas with an iron shovel and feel that it was coming on to California full of speed.

For this was shoveling! And it was play and poetry, the pure poetry of unconditioned existence. I had broken into a new freedom, and now the hampering drifts had freed me from motion onward, the last inhibition, to motion inward, outward — complete, self-expressing motion.

Under the touch of the wind the hickory handle of the shovel and the broad, tempered blade of steel hummed like some hollow harp. Everything hummed: the white frame of the prairie, the blue, sprung frame of the sky, the creaking human frame that I had been possessed of, now the great organ of this polar symphony, spheric, harmonious with

That undisturbèd Song of pure consent.

The universe is held together by harmony. Every piece of its machinery is a musical instrument. Every great opera-

tion is either a symphony or a chorus in which each black-clad cricket has a fiddle, each lonesome toad a solo, and only the discordant human soul no place and part. In tune with all being I was part of this vast chorus, vested with the trailing surplice of the snow. It was a new song. All remembered sounds were silenced in the mighty din. Filling choir and nave and transept our fierce wild anthem thundered through the rafters until the starry rivets must have rattled in their sockets, and the girders of the firmament seemed to bend and buckle under the beating of the universal song.

The hurricane possessed me. It lent me unimaginable might. I could have dug a passage through the Milky Way. It were as nothing to shovel off these heaven-wide hills and roll their single snowball across the prairies to the ridge of the Rockies and over, if only the wind would continue to blow into me and brace me for the final heft and heave.

'You're puffing like a porpoise,' said Daphne, as I shook the snow from my clothes and got back into the car. 'You're not so young as you used to be. And why do you plunge at every one of these deepest snowbanks?'

'If you'll take the wheel for half a mile, you'll know why, Daphne. And that'll give me a chance to stuff my fingers in my ears.'

'There, there, I'll promise not to speak another word today. But you must certainly love to shovel!'

And this was the wife of my bosom — for now these thirty years! But no wife understands her husband, I am convinced of that. How could I explain to her that I had been harping, not shoveling? That, instead of hearing the howling of the winds, she was listening to

> . . . the bright Seraphim in burning row
> Their loud uplifted angel trumpets blow?

I had started to tell her that I thought we were approaching The Better Country, only she would insist on discovering it for herself. So we started on, with her remarking that unless she watched me every minute I would stick her here in a snowbank till Christmas, and then where would be our Better Country? And I remarked, right here in Kansas, possibly, as I had tried to tell her. Then she remarked that the place didn't appeal to her, as she had intimated before. Then I remarked that I thought we were not going to utter a word all day. And she remarked that she had kept her part of the contract perfectly, but that I *would* hit holes and shoot into snowbanks just to make talk. So on we went, a long time married, and very much addicted to each other.

The road through here had been broken out the evening before by the two east-bound California cars. During the night, however, the gale had raked these arctic fields and piled the fine, dry hay in deep windrows across the trail. The Sourdoughs' car had left the town ahead of us, and we were ploughing after it, even Daphne resigned to the early bird's catching this particular worm.

Higher and brighter climbed the sun, at our backs fortunately, touching the glittering wastes about us with an all but blinding light. And now the scene changed, under the warmer rays, till suddenly the wide prairie was on tiptoe, an illimitable ballroom, full of ghostly wraiths in gossamer who were dancing with the sun. They rose from everywhere against the turquoise sky, and, melting into the arms of the light, went swirling about us to the waltz

of the winds, chilled breaths of figures that would expire in the air, or faint and vanish over the floor of the snow.

I stopped again to adjust the chains when the wind caught my hat and sucked it with a slap under the car, then, wrenching the half-open door from my grasp, reached in and snatched the set of strip-maps out of Daphne's hand and sent them like a flock of snowbirds far over the prairie.

Over the prairie I went after them, across the smoking crests, upon the buoyant winds, almost with wings, when, on real wings, from all about me, rose an immense flock of several thousand horned larks, and, banking against the wind, wheeled and swept past me, banked again, and, veering as with a single wing, came to earth about me in nearly the spot from which I had flushed them. What sailors they were! The way they trimmed their sheets and came about just above my head in that wild blow was as pretty a maneuver of winds and wings as ever brought a bark unfurling to her berth.

I caught up with all but two of the flying maps. By some freak or whim the gale had cut in and taken the bits of cardboard for a waltz. Not one wind was here, but a multitude, with spaces in between, pockets and sucking holes, and twisters, where the strips were held fixed to nothing, pinned to some vacuum wall, then clapped to earth and pegged there by a spinning little swirl. This was a sort of training ground for tornadoes.

Slamming the door, I squeezed in behind the wheel, so groggy from the manhandling of the wind, the glare of the sun, and the excess of ozone swallowed in my panting chase at the unaccustomed altitude, that I was unfit to proceed. But what a cup of life I had quaffed!

Now we were crawling up a long, wind-bared slope, and as we mounted the ridge we saw a touring car below us half buried in a curling drift, and recognized our friends the Sourdoughs. And Sourdough himself was out in snow to his waist digging, digging like a badger. I was in a cheerful mood, a bit light-headed, possibly, from the rarefied air, and this digging of Sourdough's and his swearing (you could see by every jerk of the shovel he was swearing) was just a taste too much. Life was sweet! And this was such a human scene!

'What are you doing?' asked Daphne as I throttled down and stopped at a safe distance from the scene.

'Waiting for Sourdough to dig me out.'

Yet what was he doing, the grouch, but excavating his hind wheels and throwing the snow directly behind him in the road. This went to Daphne's head. I am a charge upon her conscience at all times, but never so heavy a charge as when I shirk. She could have helped Sourdough heap up that snow against me for my not lending him a hand, just to save my slacker soul.

But I had been digging. And after all a shovel is a shovel and not a golden harp to twang for a pair like the Sourdoughs. Besides, I had been bucking the wind, too, and I was content to sit on my conscience and pant a while. Daphne's gayety was rapidly turning to scorn as she asked:

'Aren't you going to help him dig?'

'He's going strong.'

'But can't you feel for Mrs. Sourdough?'

'I could if she wore dresses, Daphne, but trousers on a woman don't intrigue me. It's good for him to shovel.'

'But it isn't good for his wife to hear him swear.'

'She can't hear him in a wind like this, Daphne. He's got to get it out of his system; and what a mercy to his wife this mad wind is!'

'But how are we to get out?' And hardly had she put the pertinent question when there came so swift and strange an answer to it that I should not dare to use it were I writing fiction and not the actual chronological facts. While Daphne was still speaking, up over the sharp crest just beyond the Sourdoughs' car, poked the wide, flat snout of a caterpillar tractor or tank. The weird thing had pushed up from the hollow out of sight like some huge Galapagos turtle from its burrow. On it bore steep toward the Sourdoughs, patting down the soft snow with its endless paws, and without an interrupted *chug-chug-chug*, edged out on the drift and crawled around the stalled car, slewed back into the road and crawled around my car, leaving a crooked but firm-packed track ahead, which I took instantly up to, and around the shoveling, swearing Sourdough, and on westward toward La Junta, the world all mine as far ahead as I could see and straight up to heaven. But I had forfeited Daphne, perhaps forever!

'I thought you pretended to be a Christian!' she said, a trifle icily.

'That's just what I do pretend to be, like everybody. But, as you said last night at Dodge City, this case of the Sourdoughs seems domestic and private. They need to dig their own way out. There is no hurry about their getting to Walla Walla. It might be a good thing for them to be stuck in the drifts alone out here.'

Push and pull, back out and buck again, was the order all day, with here and there a long free stretch of almost bare

road which gave wings to our wheels and spirits, carrying us up to the high places where we seemed to hang like eagles on the tremendous landscape.

Occasionally we could look down into the valley of the Arkansas, or glide with the river for a turn along its laggard course, as like some bare canal it drains from gully and ravine the gray wash of this gray and treeless land. Across the wide river the dromedary hills, their tawny humps three thousand feet against the sky, swung with us in an endless caravan.

Ask a river for the story of its country, but learn to speak the river's language first. I could not talk to the Arkansas, so stark a stranger was it, silenter and more of a stranger than the Platte, telling me only one thing clearly — that it flowed from the edge of 'the land of little rain,' an alien land where I must think of water, not as the gift of Heaven, but as impounded, bought and sold, the property of man.

This and all accompanying it was so different in the Hills of Hingham! The windmills planted everywhere out over the plain had something unusual in their appearance — their greater numbers, their squatter shapes, their bowed, belabored looks, a sign of what from here on to the seacoast is an ever-increasing problem until it becomes paramount in human affairs.

We were entering the land of irrigation, and, as the evidences of it impressed themselves upon our imagination, we began to wonder if we were so close to The Better Country! No one had to pump in Hingham. But no one rested from his pumping out here. The seventh creative day had but just dawned in this arid country and God had had no chance to rest from his labors here. The vast South-

west is still unfinished, and God and man are working at it together with irrigation, a gigantic scheme, and on a scale so daring that it is nothing short of cosmic and divine.

See the monster Gog-and-Magog machines for making its Martian canals! Unwieldy, uncouth, primordial shapes in steel that bulk like those giant ground sloths, the Gravigrads of the Pleistocene, who walked upon the sides of their feet, uprooting trees with their claws. Machines they are which actually lay down new ribs of rock for the earth, block the course of rivers, spread inland seas upon the tops of mountains, and out of liquid stone build basins where the rain clouds gather when their strength is spent. Where no plant of the field was yet in the earth, and no herb of the field had yet sprung up, because God had not caused the rain to fall upon the earth, here spills the water from the basins, here run rivers from the mountains, upon this seventh great creative day, and gardens and green fields and orchards appear, and man to till them, until they cover with glowing life what had been a lap of ashes in a Hagar land.

CHAPTER XIII

AT THE TOP OF RATON PASS

The Sourdoughs crept into La Junta along with Daphne and me and one other load of pilgrims. We pulled in singly, after the city had set lights in the windows for us, to our shame. One had better stay in Hingham, as I have said, than to travel anywhere — particularly to the country we were seeking — after dark.

Unfamiliar turns, blind guide-posts for the blind, looming shadows, impending walls, weariness, hunger, and a temper fit to carve a T-bone steak — these were the entrance into La Junta of one who had left Dodge City so gallantly with the dawn. Daphne said she hoped I would quickly find a T-bone steak and begin to worry it, as tough a one as they made out here, and she didn't know anything tougher that was made, she said, than a T-bone steak.

T-bones are for breakfast. This had been too hard a run to finish off with a T-bone steak, harder on Daphne than on me, I feared, and rather hard on the machine. But Daphne wasn't wasting tears on the machine. I would have wasted mine on Daphne if tears could have atoned for the condition of the road and the quality of the driving, both sins of mine when bad. I have all sympathy for Daphne, freely confessing to her that, rather than be driven by anybody, I would live and die in Hingham. What the dear thing can stand in the way of road shock, and shock to her faith in an overruling Providence, puts her out of my class both physically and spiritually. I did

not have the nerve to wrestle with a T-bone at La Junta, but Daphne closed with one. Her nerve is always with her.

Life's highway, particularly the détour to The Better Country, is frequently like the stretch of it between Dodge City and La Junta. One must expect such runs, and take them for what they are. And if they are too long, then stop at Las Animas, as we might have done, and so saved ourselves those last twenty-two miles in the dark. Making life hard is a favorite pastime for most of us. Then, at least, we could have seen Las Animas, which we passed by for La Junta, which we couldn't see. How shall we ever know but that one of these two places was the very place which we were seeking? It matters little by what narrow postern one departs from a city, if only one's entrance through the gates is abundant, and one is given the keys to the city, and a right to its tree of life. When we start out again to continue our search for The Better Country, I vow that I will nightly pitch my tent against the sunset. And Daphne vows that she will strike hers every morning against the dawn!

The ideal motor travel in our wide land is by 'pullmanized auto' (a Kansas City term), and at the first call of the whippoorwill, or at the first faint wash of dusk, to turn into a pasture beside a stream, or into an arroyo, unlimber the frying-pan, hang out your tail-light, and be in your sleeping-bag what time the coyotes begin to howl.

It was near nine o'clock when we came blinking into La Junta, and the fact of our getting in at all is proof that the two hundred and twenty-four miles were not very bad miles. Indeed, as I think of them now, they were very good. We crossed the Kansas-Colorado line near Holly, and were

apprised of this new stage of the journey by the very serious change from spilled corn along the road to spilled sugar beets. We began to see beets, if I remember, before we left Kansas. For days and days, certainly since leaving Indiana, we had been following, like Babes in the Woods, a sprinkling by the roadside of yellow grains of corn. We liked the fancy — this sparse trail of golden kernels with now and again a great golden ear. What a larded people! What a fattened, corn-fed land!

Now the sign in Colorado had changed to sugar beets, big, white, unnatural mangles; and Daphne became suspicious and on her guard. They were even a danger to the tires. But graver dangers, county-wide, came with them into our path, for they had jolted off the overloaded Tariff wagon on its way along this frozen trail; and we were driving a democratic car. For Daphne every one of them was loaded with TNT. A heavy-eared stalk of Indian corn was the totem of her Ohio tribe, whereas in following the track of this protected sugar beet she saw only the spoor of the Cloven Hoof. She glared at every one of them and begged me to run them down.

But in their present frozen condition they were literally loaded with TNT for pneumatic tires, so we must leave them, I told her, to the wrath of God.

'He is too slow to anger,' was her studied reply. 'God intended this country about here for cattle. Look at it! He intended Cuba for sugar-cane. But God is mocked by the tariff.'

Thus we whiled away the latter miles, our capacity for scenery having by this time been exhausted. Two hundred miles of the same scenery for the same day is about my

limit. So naturally we turned to the tariff, and there being no Republican present, I assumed that rôle, *pro tempore, propaganda fide*, in order to give Daphne the chance to do a little driving, for she would grow dreadfully cramped.

Colorado is much more than sugar beets, and La Junta is much more than we can report. I could burn this record for its inadequacy; as at times I could bite off my tongue for harping on the crimes of my country, when, among all of the other nations of the earth, there is not one for which I can honestly chant such a pæan of praise.

We passed the night in La Junta, but there is no picture on the film. I had been over-exposed as for that day. Besides, I was uneasy in my mind, and more eager than Daphne the next morning to be off, for to tell the plain truth I was haunted by the fear of Raton Pass.

I had never seen a mountain pass; at least not to drive an automobile over one. The thing had often figured as a thriller in my history from Thermopylæ and down — a narrow, slippery, deadly place where one man could stop a thousand. I couldn't pick another word from all of the dictionary so disquieting to my diaphragm. It has dreadful connotations for me. I hoped to meet my first pass like a Spartan. I could die any day fighting in a pass hand to hand with a mortal man. But besides being hampered with a woman, I must attack the pass with a powerful motor car — over a shelf of a road cut like the thread of a screw down a mountain wall, and fenced only by the perpendicular of sheer and awful space!

Such were my dreams, anyhow, that night in La Junta. Time and again since reaching Dodge City I had heard low rumors of Raton Pass, whisperings, and bated talk,

as if that place impinged upon the imagination of this section of the country, and kept the spirits of all motorists ascending and descending in low gear long after doing Raton Pass.

La Junta was miles behind us when Daphne asked, rather abruptly,

'Why are you so preoccupied this morning?'

'Just wondering.'

'About ——'

'Raton Pass, Daphne.'

'Aren't we going to see it?'

'Yes.'

'Then why not wait and wonder *at* it? It's a perfectly thrilling spot, they say.'

'So they do say, Daphne. I've heard 'em. I heard one shaken fellow say it was thrilling indeed.'

'You're not afraid of Raton Pass, are you?' looking at me like some slant-eyed Lady Macbeth.

'What do you take me for, Daphne?' I protested.

'Never for what you are, dear, but always for what I'm trying to make you. That's the hard lot of wives. If you wish *me* to drive down Raton Pass, however, turn over the wheel to me now. I have never driven, you know, and will need a little practice.'

'*You* drive down Raton Pass!' — lowering the window for air. 'If you have a hanky at hand, kindly lend it to me,' I begged her, the cold sweat liable to becloud my vision.

The tiny square of linen with the breath of arbutus, my favorite perfume, pervaded my being, encountering and curing the slinky, queasy feeling in the center of me. I

squeezed her hand confidently as I gave her back the fragrant little rag.

'We are still on the Hingham side of the Pass,' she began again.

'But we won't be long,' I assured her, giving the machine more gas.

'And after all,' she went on, 'this running away from home and duty begins a little to trouble me.'

'Me too,' I answered, agreeing for once so quickly with her that she turned, shocked with surprise, to see what I meant. 'Besides we're making such wretched time.'

Yet right through here such enchanting time! Every moment now brought us a new scene of interest and even of splendor. Near and far was instant change and utter newness. Nothing in line or color or posture was familiar. We forgot the pass; forgot the seven-forty train in Los Angeles; forgot Hingham and the thing called 'duty,' as we lingered along the curves in the climbing road trying to satisfy the insatiable thirst of our souls.

I was for stopping. This was near enough to The Better Country. To possess a cañon up here, or a mountain-top, or a cedared meadow among these mountains answered perfectly to the vague, unresting urge within me. Go over into the land and possess it — Daphne says was to have been spoken only to me. And it meant every place on the earth. All pretty children, too, I tell her, all pretty horses, all nice dogs, birds, flowers — but only one woman. The end of the world shall come before the end of the novelty of living with Daphne. I would like to live everywhere, and yet, as Daphne says, I have made it almost impossible for her to separate me from my

pruning shears and wheelbarrow and my puttering about the place in Hingham.

On up we wound, under walls and over bridges, out into mountain meadows and across the flats where squat cedars and piñon pines stood black against the quilted snow. These particular trees were disposed with clear-spaced freedom in dark patches, as Eastern trees never are, except where planted by landscape gardeners. Yet these were natural forests, though it was difficult to believe it; wind-sown and unattended except by the hands of the winds. No, there were other hands, as unseen as the winds, that had arranged and shaped them, cool, damp hands far below the sunbaked crust of the soil.

It struck us here that we had come into a more brilliant light than any thus far upon the trail. This may have been simply a clearer, better-lighted day. Yet the quality of the light was different. We seemed to see the blue pouring air. Everything had edge to the sharpest outline, standing silhouetted against the snow and sky with a definition so new as to be almost startling to our misty Eastern eyes. And then at the top of the grade!

This sounds faster than it really was. If only one could describe exactly what happens, exactly as it happens — that would be immortality no matter what the theme. To tell the truth, and nothing but the truth to Daphne is sometimes hard enough, hard as she is to lie to. She sees the holes in stories as she sees them in socks. And if ever she complains, with the apostle, of things she ought to have done which are left undone, it won't be that she left me undarned. I can hardly escape telling her the truth, yet I wonder with pen and paper if I, or any one else, ever tells the truth?

But this the doubter can do: he can go to the top of Raton Pass and see for himself. Let him go on a December afternoon, however, when the winter sunlight is playing upon the snow-wrapped plains of New Mexico far below him, and far away southward over the peak-etched sky. The purples of that first flight of my soul over the plains of New Mexico flood back upon me now as something inexpressibly lovely, something unaccountably sublime. For not being accustomed to think in color, I had never experienced it before as religion, nor consciously worshiped God as shades of lavender, lilac, and violet, the flowers of heaven, banked about and empurpling the Great White Throne.

We drew up at a railed bend on the highest arch of the road and from there took wing over the world below, over mesa, butte, and cañon to the farthest rimrock walls. Where, in Kansas, hill crowded hill, bumped up against the zenith, and shouldered back the circling horizon for infinite bare terrain, here, over New Mexico, space seemed vertical as well as horizontal, concaved and deeply vaulted, earth as remote and almost as purple as heaven, serene, and just as fair.

In spite of our rapid preparation for the change from Middle West to Southwest since leaving the Platte, the abruptness, and the completeness of the transition here from the top of Raton Pass was overwhelming. The panorama was lost in its own unrollings across the rims of what seemed like immeasurable space. Here lay levels reaching through the slanting light to wider verges than we had ever traversed. Mountains were heaped in every direction as for the building of new worlds, range back

of range, in pastel tones beneath a warm wash of color reflected from the sky.

Perspectives, too, were strange, and dispositions of things so unlike those eastward as to deceive our cautioned senses. Emerging from the near, and sometimes narrow, trail into this tremendous prospect, we saw what at first seemed like the unreal substance of a mirage. Our eyes were full of fog, as if a gray scud of our own Atlantic still drifted through our ken, and we could see but semblance only, a world dreamed into being by some lover of line and color, in place of the solid old sphere we knew, laid rock over rock by the slow trowel of Time.

We had crossed this country once before, by train, and had not missed a single daylight mile of it. But the train did not stop on the crown of Raton Mountain. Only by motor car can you climb such heights and halt where you will and as long as you will, then flit away as fast as you will over a land as immeasurable in terms of human feet as this America.

Ask me for the rewards and benefits of this unseasonable transcontinental motor trip and I will take you to the top of Raton Pass. You will ask me nothing more. Your answer is here on the threshold of the desert. Terrible at high noon, but how tender at twilight! How fresh and beautiful is the desert at dawn!

> I am the desert; bare since time began,
> Yet do I dream of motherhood, when man
> One day shall look upon my charms
> And give me towns like children to my arms.

CHAPTER XIV

THE PHŒBE-BIRD OF LAS VEGAS

THE drop down Raton Pass was not difficult except for the brakes. There is one kink in the road down Mullein Hill with a distinct Ratonish touch to it; and on that Massachusetts curve, quite unknown to me, I had been preparing for this descent into New Mexico. One discovers slowly that one's hill in Hingham is pretty much of a mountain after all.

I have lived a part of my life on hilltops, yet sheer height still instantly undoes me. Perhaps there are persons who love the mountains more than I do. I have never met them, unless the test is one for steady brain and nerve. I am often falling over precipices in my dreams. All day long in our climb up the Raton Mountains, my grief lying onward 'and my joy behind,' I had been going down the Pass. From far back along the way it had been my determined purpose to take the Pass at noon, for I am quite a bold person at high noon.

However, we had not reached Trinidad by one o'clock, and it was a low-slanting sun which shone upon us at the railing on the crown of the mountain gazing out over the far-flung plains. Here, as we pulled back into the trail, rested and braced for the plunge by the unearthly beauty of the scene, a little thing occurred which might have strung me up again, but which, on the contrary, proved to be good medicine for my nerves.

I had started ahead in second up to a sharp bend, before

the down grade began, and, turning, saw below me a skidded touring car crosswise of the narrow road, and apparently blocking it against me, its front wheels deep in the mire. At the same instant from behind the car came a hopping, gesticulating man, shouting madly, 'Come down in gear! Come down in gear!'

I was certainly coming down, and I was coming down in gear. Nothing but the soft clay which he was in could stop me, for I had snapped off the gas, touched the foot-brake, only to feel the machine waver, the rear wheel slide over the slant of the road, and on down at the car ahead. But I had slipped to the opposite side of the road, luckily, and I now saw that we might squeeze by, if only the frantic man would take his body out of the way instead of using it as a fender for his car. And by we slid, barely grazing the other machine, and, getting back to the crown, shifted into low as the real drop began.

The poor fellow behind me had lost his nerve. I have since seen other men do it in the mountains. As an early case, however, and a bad one, it fell under my eye at a critical moment, just as my car felt the first pull of the grade, offering me the familiar chance of a collision in the place of this unfamiliar fear. I got into low with a forward jump and a jolt from the gears which would have sickened me had not the neat adventure at the turn behind put me into perfect self-possession.

But then another thing happened that nearly dispossessed me of my self-possession. It was a big sign that came suddenly into view, boasting of how this Pass is always open the year around, a silly distraction, to which in my new confidence I lent at least a glancing eye. That

was more than I could spare from the wheel, for roaring round a point of wall straight at me, and away out on my side of the slippery curve, came a car from below.

I gripped the wheel and headed straight at the rushing thing, prepared to take what was coming to me head-on in the middle of the eerie shelf, rather than by a leap into empty space where the situation was forcing me. The driver below cut hard for the wall and darted from under me, scraped past, and was gone.

The rest of that descent is a blank. I remember hearing Daphne say, 'It's all right,' as the cars passed. She was looking out of the window at that moment into the dreadful depths below, and I heard her murmur, 'It's all right. I can still see the edge of the road under the running-board.'

Ten thousand automobiles have doubtless gone safely up and down that grade. What ten thousand cars have done is no novelty for my car to do — except for Daphne and me. It will require the wheels of many cars to wear Raton Pass to a lifeless level for the novice out of hills like those in Hingham.

The bigger the crowd the lonesomer every member of it. Daphne sighs, and says we're just the average. But I tell her that is to have the most extraordinary adventure in the world. If there is a place where no one has ever been, it isn't worth going to. What no one has ever done may be worth doing, but the odds are against it, for the really important things are those we have been repeating since the world began. Novelty is the least durable of the virtues. Let me find the universal in myself, I tell her, and I am no more envious of my neighbors; and if we had

really searched we might have found it in Hingham and been saved this trip to Santa Barbara, a far and foolish journey.

She only said that I would feel better in the morning, but that she wished I wouldn't use her for a congregation. And as for novelties out of the seed catalogues, and at the hands of agents — hybrids, panaceas, universal devices — I was as open as the Patent Office.

The car never paused at the bottom of the Pass. It had too much momentum. And so had I, enough, indeed, to carry me through Raton town and on perpetually.

> For God's deare love, Sir Knight, doe not me stay,
> For loe! he comes, he comes fast after me!

I could have cried if a policeman had tried to hold me up, as down the one through street I fled in order to get as far as possible before nightfall from this village with Raton Pass, like a hangman's noose, about its neck.

Daphne approves of making time, but she was quite disgusted at this way of entering a new State, and one so different and interesting as New Mexico. Had the day been younger, and not already rather overcrowded with emotion, we might have stopped with profit in Raton town; but I needed a respite from emotional heights and depths, and other sorts, and as it stretched before me in the shape of a wide, *level* road, running out of Raton westward, I embraced it.

For twenty-five miles we sang along over an extensive snow-covered plain, or plateau, the Raton Mountains behind us, with rimrock heights near us ahead, beyond which stood shadowy ranges everywhere against the distant, darkening sky.

The ineffable beauty we had looked down upon from the top of the Pass had receded, and we were travelers in the twilight here of a bleak and wind-swept land. We met a two-horse wagonload of baled alfalfa hay going out from the town. We hoped the scattered range cattle, thin and shivering in the shelterless snow, would get a cud of it, for they were starving all over this part of New Mexico. Then we passed one for which the hay had come too late. The snow that lay so deep from here almost to the California line was unusual, and it had brought intense suffering to the herds on the open ranges, where in winter, under the most favorable conditions, the pickings among the sage are lean enough.

At nowhere in particular, but all of a sudden, the good road ended, and ended also the effects of Raton Pass. We had our hands full, with nothing that called for nerve, but a plenty that took all the muscle and patience we could spare. Night overtook us in Springer, with miles enough to satisfy Daphne, with passes enough to satisfy me, and the rest of our company that straggled into Springer with us, five cars all told.

We were herded up a long, steep flight of stairs for our rooms, over a store (the hotel undergoing repair), into a vestibule or waiting room where a big stove burned and the odor of iodine smelled of doctors. As we came pounding into the room, a door opened, and a dentist, with a grin on his face and a horrid pair of forceps in his fist, stepped out and said he was ready, that he would take us together and clean us up at once. Raton Pass had evidently left no dint upon my imagination, for all night long I dreamed of that fellow pulling teeth, old tusks and

milk teeth, trying to make a clean job and a toothless town of Springer.

Whatever boom qualities the town of Springer has were dampened by the weather, and by our late arrival and early departure; for Daphne had me leading the procession through the gates of the city while still their warders slept. Such travel does not improve a town. Springer should have the right to debar the visitor during the inclement and bad-roads season and so protect her properties and prospects against the unfavorable impressions of those, especially, who come at random in the dark, and, shunning the daylight, depart in the dark. But I am sure that Springer has a dentist with a strong right arm.

It was noon when we halted in Las Vegas, the first twenty-six miles of the run neither fit to be mentioned nor remembered, the next twenty-five miles into Las Vegas an eternal reward. How a stretch of good road in and out of a town makes that town's face to shine! I told Daphne that I should like to live in Las Vegas, and she agreed with me that it was a gem of a place, for those who liked exactly that kind of a place, but that she expected Santa Barbara to be different. She would grow provincial, she said, in a town like Las Vegas with only a single road in and a single road out, and passable for only twenty-five miles either way.

Stopping here for a bite to eat, we had hardly taken our seats when in came the linseed-oil man and his young squire. We had not seen 'the gentle knight' since the evening in Dodge City. Then in came the loud-voiced man in all of his furs; but not his lanky son and family.

And tagging them came the dear Sourdoughs, whom we had left at La Junta.

'It's all up with them,' I whispered to Daphne. 'They've agreed to part.'

'No,' she assured me, 'it's not that. He's hungry, that's all. Men look that way when they are hungry, poor things, before they're fed.'

His hands were grimy, his face had a muddy streak across it, and I heard him say to the waiter that a tire chain had worked loose, and, catching the tip of his left mud-guard, had ripped the whole thing off. We were much relieved. But don't tell me that an automobile doesn't know who's driving it. Feed the driver drink and his car goes on a bat. Let him grab the wheel in a grouch and the machine will kick over the traces like a mule. The Sourdoughs turned up with the surest of us, but minus mud-guards and the ampler protection of a smile.

The portly proprietress of the restaurant warped slowly among the tables and tied up a moment alongside of us.

'Goin' West, I suppose?'

'Yes,' I replied.

'I've just come back, myself,' she said. 'Been spendin' some time with my sister in Santa Barbara. But I'm sure glad to get back to Las Vegas.'

'What's the matter with Santa Barbara?' I asked, looking at Daphne.

'Everything. No elbow room, no open range, no cattle, no business, nobody stoppin' like yourselves. Nothin' goin' on. Good Lord! What does a body want to live in Santa Barbara for, when they could live in a real place like Las Vegas?'

'Or in Hingham,' I added, thoughtfully.

'Where?' she asked. 'How do you spell it? Hing-h-a-m. No, I never heard of it. Do you live in such a place?'

'We did,' I replied, a bit tamely.

'That's all righty. Everybody to their taste. Queer world, ain't it! But not so queer as the folks in it, stickin' theirselves off on a sidin' like Santa Barbara, or this Ham of yourn, when they might have a station on the main line here in Las Vegas.' And she rolled over to see what ailed the order of Sourdough, for he looked like thunder.

I must say that Las Vegas did look rather good to me after that talk, or after that dinner — as Daphne hinted. What a chamber of commerce president this lady of the restaurant would make! What a Rotarian or a Lioness! I suggested to Daphne that we look about this Las Vegas town, for the lady had been to Santa Barbara. She had compared the two places. Wasn't it significant, perhaps, that she had returned to Las Vegas?

'So do the phœbes return to the pig-pen on Mullein Hill,' she answered, 'from climes farther off than Santa Barbara. It means nothing in such a woman, just the homing instinct. She's only a bird, a phœbe.'

She may have been a transmigrated dodo, but she certainly was no phœbe. Still she had done what my phœbes do, and I somehow liked her for it. Las Vegas must be a pretty good place with one such booster in it. And I began to wonder about Santa Barbara, whether it were the country we were seeking, The Better Country of dear Astrid's letters and our dreams? And if it had its phœbes the same as Las Vegas and Hingham? They would be back to the pig-pen in March, by the twentieth, at the

latest. Not so bad a place for phœbes, either, that pig-pen on the top of Mullein Hill!

Daphne had climbed into the car and loudly clicked the door.

'Shan't we take a turn about the town?'

'We really haven't time. And if all we hear is true, we ought not to look at any place until after we have seen Santa Fe. Do you know, I half wish we were not going beyond Santa Fe?'

'Yes, I know, dear. I'm beginning to have doubts myself about Santa Barbara — and this whole business of The Better Country. I'll stop in Santa Fe, if we can stop. But I'm afraid we never can stop — anywhere.'

CHAPTER XV

PANTHERS IN SANTA FE

Our whereabouts on this leg of the voyage should be taken from Daphne's log, for she made the observations. I was too busy at the helm. Bringing our craft through Glorieta Pass that day would have tuckered Charon. A recent storm had carried away most of the bridges, cut deep into the arroyos, gullied, and at some critical passages, even relocated, the trail. Had I been coming through the rye, or through the Pearly Gates instead of through Glorieta Pass, I tell Daphne, and the road had been like this, I should have missed the Gates. But would I miss anything in the rye, she wondered?

As for Glorieta Pass she declared it was the Pearly Gates themselves, or their nearest earthly counterpart. I saw enough to realize that nothing fairer had swung open to us since leaving Hingham, and when they closed upon us that December afternoon, shutting us into the ancient city of Santa Fe, I had a presentiment that it was for life, Hingham no longer behind me, Santa Barbara no longer before me, but The Better Country here about me, real — yet too, too fair and like a dream!

Perhaps we should not have gone on. I think, perhaps, we may have to go back to Santa Fe before the end of the journey. On the last turn of the desert road shutting Santa Fe from sight stands my spirit, a pillar of salt.

Santa Fe is a very old city for the United States, older, indeed, than the States, though not so very much older

than Hingham. We have one of the oldest grist mills in Hingham, and the 'oldest meeting house in continuous use in America.' We have been most continuously preached to in Hingham, not a single Sunday without its sermon from the pulpit of that Old Meeting House since the year 1681. And Hingham still stands in the need of preaching, and also in the need of prayer.

The hand-mills of Santa Fe are older than the tide-mill of Hingham, which began to grind under the harbor wall in 1645, but like the mill of Hingham they have almost ceased grinding, so exceeding small they grind. I did see one Indian squaw with her stone mortar and pestle pounding frijoles as her tribe had done since long before Juan de Oñate discovered Sante Fe in 1598.

It is not the age of Santa Fe which holds the imagination prisoner. Age is only by comparison. If I am bent on antiquity, let me stay on my hill in Hingham, for this hill came pickaback to Hingham by glacier in the Great Ice Age, many years ago. Here the hill has stayed intact, uneroded so far as I can observe during the past twenty-five seasons, while everything about Santa Fe, and especially in Glorieta Pass, changes shape and shifts location with every flood.

Time has touched Santa Fe, to be sure, a healing, gentling touch, the more grateful to us coming in from the new, raw West. There is a past here which has not broken with the present, an atmosphere that is hazy with perspective, but which is even more richly colored by environment.

For it is a strange city, and foreign, but nothing European. Santa Fe is Southwestern, Indian, Mexican, adobe,

remote in place, reserved in manners. The 'main line,' which passes through the lively city of Las Vegas, leaves Santa Fe far on the side. But if business does not find her, poets and painters do. The booster, the subdivider, and the one-hundred-per-cent Americanizer go on to Los Angeles and down to Miami. It is the lover of old ways, quiet, sequestered ways, of shadowy forests and the luring, enthralling desert, who seeks out Sante Fe.

In Florida at Miami live the Harvester King, the Patent Medicine King, the Candy King, the Copper King, the Shirt King, the Corset King, the Collar King, the Typewriter King, the Automobile King; while over at Orlando live the Celery and the Chewing Gum kings, with other kings at Palm Beach. A few Hopi chiefs come to trade in Santa Fe, but the kings of Wall Street don't traffic with them, and, thank Heaven, they still find this New Mexico city incontiguous and too high in altitude, quickening overmuch the heart and slowing down the brain.

There is no 'odor of affluence' in Santa Fe. You do not smell money about the place, even in the hotels, but the sweet savor of tamales, the breath of piñon pines, and the air of immemorial habits which is both romance and repose. You walk in beauty, but whether of the mesa, or of the dark, green mountains, or of the supernal daybreak and twilight skies, I cannot tell. Of all of them, perhaps, and a beauty somewhat of the people, too, with whom the Indians have bartered pots and baskets and beadwork — culture for commodity; and left within their city the touch of line and color, the feeling for old customs and traditions, and a sense of spiritual values not apparent in

Las Vegas, nor even in Hingham for all her glacial hilltops, her mill and meeting house, and her old, crooked, elm-arched streets where the shadowy feet of Pilgrim and of Puritan still echo as they pass.

Daphne declared that we entered Santa Fe under some kind of spell; that we might come a hundred times, yet never find it quite so fair again. That seems reasonable. I am addicted to spells. But that Daphne should have fallen under one speaks volumes for the scenery in Glorieta Pass. The whole afternoon run was remarkable. Except where the bridges were out, and where those curves on the grade were made uncertain by wash, and by the sloppy snow, no part of our journey from Hingham was so new, so exhilarating, so varied and beautiful as on the red, unwinding trail out of Las Vegas over the lofty mesas and meadows which seemed equally of earth and sky.

We gained these higher levels immediately upon leaving Las Vegas, where we found ourselves swinging up and around a heaving world of wooded heights, as spacious as heaven and as clean and full of color, only green and white instead of blue and white, the red road tying us here and there to the earth and our earthly course.

The sky was clear — amazingly clear! The sun struck and splintered upon every mountain head and shoulder, but gathered into shimmering pools at the bottoms of the high valleys which swung between the crests, the thrilling light, unspeakably translucent, darkening the pine and cedar forests to a bronzy black against the snow.

These wooded areas were native forests, but they left you feeling that you were riding through the most beautifully kept of parks. The low bushy trees stood on plotted

slopes that were constantly mowed by the scythe of the sun, and so raked by the winds that, where the snow had melted and left the bare ground free, you saw neither underbrush nor slashings, but only broken rock and boulders strewn about the clean-swept lawns.

Yet every tree looked trimmed, and every one had apparently been planted with studied care. We had been struck with this open and regular spacing on our way out of La Junta. We knew, before we were done with the desert, that it was the cunning hand of Drouth, wise old gardener of the Arid Lands, at work here, setting each tree off over its own scant well of water, but so that it shall not drink from its neighbor's well when the snow has vanished and the red sands smoke in the burning summer sun.

And here for the first time on the journey we had a warm day and signs of spring: patches of tender green close against the sun-touched boulders, spicy, resinous odors from the evergreens, and flocks of birds — juncos, stellar jays, and Rocky Mountain bluebirds. Only those who have seen the blue of this bluebird can conceive of it as belonging to the earth, so ethereal is it, so bodyless does it seem to float along. Had this been my first vision of the bird (I had seen him the winter before in the California desert), our trip for the day had ended where that little flock crossed our trail.

Daphne declared again and again that these were our most beautiful miles. I argued the point feebly, for I knew she was right. Not the strangest, not the wildest, not the hardest, not the grandest, but the most beautiful miles between Hingham and Santa Barbara.

So many things conspired to make the winding pano-

rama a wonderment and glory: the contrast in weather and a dry, gravel road, itself a gracious shock; the strangeness of the landscape, together with its freedom and illimitable extent; the greeting of the Western birds, new but not strangers to me; the altitude with its riant, lilting stir in brain and heart; and Daphne — a trifle flushed, a bit hilarious (not being used to mountain wine), yet none too tipsy to quit her drinking as we climbed and coasted, no other car, so far as we could see, upon the mountains, this goodly earth all ours, and we of it, clay of its clay, spirit of its spirit, its knowing mind, its loving, understanding soul.

It is well that we had a tussle with Glorieta Pass. Such beauty long endured must either make the senses swoon or else unfit them for lesser, commoner scenes, for Santa Barbara and Hingham, should one, by any chance, miss The Better Country.

Let no one be afraid of seeing too much beauty in his cross-country travel, of finding too much 'selected scenery,' as my Boston friend puts it. We Americans need to look for beauty here, and look hard until we find it. We are boastful enough, especially since the war, over Europe, but we shall never enhance our own culture under an inferiority complex which drives us by the oceanful to Europe for our beauty.

I have heard of stretches in Texas and in Kansas and on the deserts which travelers find monotonous by train. Perhaps so. I may not be clever enough to know when I am being bored; or maybe I am easily amused, easily excited, easily deceived. I have crossed only four times by train, but the wonder is that I am not blind, or at least that one of my eyes has not a permanent cock eastward,

and the other eye a permanent cock westward, in their double endeavor to catch what was coming and keep what was going as the train sped along.

The wonder of a car window! Weary a traveler as I sometimes am, and always bent like a homing pigeon to my cote on Mullein Hill, still I never buy a railroad ticket and transportation, but always a window and a continuous show. Night comes before monotony, and how vivid it is with colored lights, and sometimes, from the rear platform, how full of homeless stars!

Variety was fairly rampant in Glorieta Pass. The enchanting scene was height on depth, with instant turns in gorge and over barring wall, as we crept narrowly through the crooked trail. And on such a tossing roadway, through such a succession of swinging, clanging gates to enter any American city! But this is the road and these the gates westward into Santa Fe.

And it was suddenly borne in upon us that this secluded city was not only an enchanted city, but it was the capital city of New Mexico, when, at the worst turn in the trail, a big car, with a registration plate bearing the single numeral I, leaped out of an arroyo upon me, jammed on its brakes like a bucking bronco, and swerved past, with scarcely a streak of daylight between. The Governor of New Mexico bowed charmingly and was gone.

I looked at Daphne. Daphne looked at me. Neither said a word. But we both thought: Politics in Glorieta Pass? How foolish and far-fetched! But why far-fetched? Only day before yesterday we had been fighting at the polls with sugar beets in Colorado. We had merely passed from a state of beets to a state of 'best minds' — to the

home state of one of the best minds in President Harding's Cabinet.

We had not really seen Santa Barbara at the time we entered Santa Fe, though on a former visit we had skirted the borders of that California town. We had come into the New Mexico city of a Sunday afternoon amid such color and calm as never filled the streets of quaint and pious Hingham. We wandered about the Sabbath streets, Mexican belles and gay dandies with us, the soothing touch of Old Mexico upon our spirits, even in the warlike square, troubled only at the thought of going on. Daphne kept wishing the two boys were here. I kept wishing that something — beyond my control, not a fire exactly — would happen to the car.

Westward the deserts would lie hot. Eastward in the heights of the mountains lay the winter snow. But Santa Fe, though born of the mountains and bred in the deserts, suffers the extremes of neither, a delicious freshness (not produced by the local chamber of commerce), due to its altitude and its peculiar environment, always prevailing in the ancient town.

I sound like a professional booster. Such boosters are all liars. I avoid them. It was love at first sight between me and Santa Fe, just as it had been between me and Daphne. My feet have wandered far since they walked with Santa Fe. Daphne has my whole heart, as I often tell her, but, should she ever miss it, she might overtake it on the road to Santa Fe if she traveled fast.

'I never saw you so soft and daffy,' she said, as we started off the next morning for Albuquerque. 'Don't be silly!'

'I'm not silly. But think of such a place! Why, a fellow shot an eight-foot mountain lion Friday only three miles out of the city! And I'm going on to Santa Barbara!' But all that Daphne said was that she wished I would give the car a little more gas, please; that panthers only three miles from town were an argument for Santa Barbara, an argument *ad hominem*, *ad gustum*, *ad finem*, and, indeed, *ad Hingham* — if Santa Barbara fails.

CHAPTER XVI

DAPHNE FALTERS

DAPHNE'S decided prejudices in respect of panthers kicked up a lively dust behind us out of Santa Fe. I needed plenty of help in quitting the town.

'You'll find,' she remarked, as we swung along toward Albuquerque, 'that twenty years in Santa Fe would discover it quite as commonplace as Hingham. And then these panthers to boot!'

'Who said Hingham was commonplace, Daphne? But wouldn't a panther in Hingham clean out the tabby cats!'

Ignoring my interruption, she went on:

'The garage man and the clerk at the hotel both told me it never freezes here — Rotary talk, I presume. If it never freezes, why don't we see orange and lemon and olive groves as we shall in Santa Barbara? It is lovely and wild here, but I'm way past panthers. This isn't the place, I'm sure.'

'You're twisting this lion's tail, Daphne. Shall I tell you just how hard you have been hit by Santa Fe? You are jealous of the young pair who shall get that tiny adobe house we saw for sale near the Plaza. You're a very wren for empty houses.'

She said nothing, and both of us fell under the spell of the strange things in the strange landscape now unrolling about us. For at last we were in the true desert, a rough, broken, Indian country of dry creeks, buttes, soapweeds,

sagebrush, and cactus, where the weird, wind-eroded walls were dripping with vivid colors in the morning light. Nothing seemed so strange as the light, and no light which we had ever seen seemed so utterly celestial, planting within us new eyes for old till we caught glimpses

Of things invisible to mortal sight.

As we were making our way up a rather stiff grade of exceedingly awkward curves, I started to say to Daphne something that had been on my mind ever since we reached Santa Fe. For I was thinking that, if anything should happen to Santa Barbara or to Hingham, we ought to look about Santa Fe, possibly, as a place for our declining years. . . .

'Declining years!' She made a clean, safe hit of my slow ball. 'You seem to have had several birthdays since reaching Santa Fe. Do I look like a declining year? But do watch out for these declining walls,' gazing down the wall of the ravine below us, that rather dropped than declined.

I was going too fast. But the day was young, there was no snow here, and what with the good road, the romantic prospect about us, and the intoxicating light and air, the car simply took the bit in her teeth — I don't like the figure; besides, Daphne says I'm shifting the responsibility to the car. But I took the reins in time.

For rather unexpectedly we had come to the infamous La Bajada grade — and ahead of us, over the very summit, hung a car. It was the Sourdoughs again! The driver had swung at the hairpin curve on the crest, but, miscalculating the extreme smallness of the arc, had cut too slow, and

stood, with cramped wheels and locked brakes, on the brink of a terrifying wall.

His wife had already got to the ground. I turned into a level spot and ran forward to help. Never have I seen an uglier situation: a pitch strongly forward, the right forward wheel with only a few inches of leeway, the set emergency brakes alone holding back the heavy machine and Sourdough — quietly facing the gulf below him, the powerful engine idling in his hand.

The position called for skill and nerve. Only instant work had stopped the outfit on the edge of the shelf, and faultless brakes, grabbing a bare foot of earth with the grip of death; and now, only quick, cool, coördinate action between released brakes and reversed gears could clutch the narrow leavings of that shelving ledge and back safely off the precipice.

I had chocked the back wheels to allow for loosened brakes, then stood back on the opposite side of the car from the woman, not able to share her anxiety in addition to my own. The engine still sang idly. Why take such a chance? And I jumped forward to tell him to shut off the power and let me hitch in behind and *pull* him back; but my jump was one to the side, out of the way of the car as it seemed to leap backward into the air, the cramp of the wheels nearly flinging it upon me.

They went on down the tortuous pass. Then I came up, and, in spite of what I had seen, so unaccountably short and deceptive was the curve here at the crest that I, too, was unable to make it at first, but had to hold, and back, in order to get around, a piece of folly that has left me feeling more than silly every time I have thought of it since.

We passed the Sourdoughs about two thirds of the way down. They had run out on a comfortable stretch to the side, and Sourdough was walking around, his hands behind his back, his head bent, like an old man suddenly. He was walking off his fright. The worst of the grade done, the strain over, his nerves had failed him, and before he could proceed, now over a rather level, rolling plain, he must get his feet upon the solid earth, to know that the frame of things had not disjointed.

I didn't dare to say anything, but I felt his weakness in my own knees, his all-goneness in the pit of my own stomach, his shame and accusation in my own mind. For who was I but one like him, only more so — fifty, and fat, and futile?

Our boys were to write to us at Albuquerque. We had been out of touch with them since leaving Chicago, and, due to some mismanagement, had not had a letter from the two lads in the desert since long before that. Daphne was hungry for letters. The older boys did not approve of this mode of travel for their parents. They thought it improper and foolhardy at this season of the year.

The younger boys, who by this time knew the meaning of the desert in both summer and winter, approved of anything which would bring us into Deep Springs Valley. But their anxiety — for so their letters, and later their talk, revealed — was far greater than their brothers', as they followed on a big map our itinerary, and guessed at our progress from day to day. It was a bet in the school that we would not get through to meet them in Los Angeles on their appointed train.

But we were running to the minute on our scheduled

time; and Albuquerque was our first all-family stop for many a day and over many a wayward mile.

Daphne was in a dream. From La Bajada grade onward she scarcely spoke to me. Her eyes were upon the passing landscape, but she never saw a thing. That run into Albuquerque is the haziest lap of the long trip to Daphne and to me as well. I was also thinking of letters. For how was Mullein Hill, I wondered, my bees, the apples in the barn cellar, and the house? Somehow I was not at peace in my soul when I thought of the deserted house. And I wondered what Casa Loma would look like, and Casita, the little house at Santa Barbara, where I was to write my great book.

One treat I had promised myself, and that was a stop in Albuquerque, in order to identify some of the old names and places, even one or two graves, if possible, connected with the early mining days in New Mexico when Albuquerque was still without a railroad, and the J. B. Price Overland Coach Company ran through from Santa Fe to Silver City and Tucson.

But the post-office first! We were conscious of having entered a bustling, modern, *Eastern* town, a blur of a town, for there was not a letter in for us from anybody!

Poor Daphne was dazed. If the dear thing could only have fainted! Could have gone and forgotten for a while! But she isn't constructed so. She has to go through with everything. If she but had my philosophy, I tell her, and could take things for what they are, as I do; her boys for what they are — four case-hardened young beggars, that needed at that instant to be turned over my knee! But

she takes things very immoderately where her children are concerned.

She didn't trust me with that Albuquerque post-office, but went in herself when I refused to go back the third time. I really half expected to see her come forth with a fist full of letters, she has such a way with her. But she came back empty-handed, and, as I helped her into the car, she only said:

'Hurry up, please, let's get out of here.'

'But we want to see the town, Daphne, and we haven't had a bite of lunch!'

'No! No!' she moaned. 'I don't ever want to eat again.'

'But I do!' I protested.

'Why do you always suggest eating,' she exclaimed, 'whenever anything happens? Everything makes you hungry! So deep, and yet so shallow!'

All I could answer was that some people took everything to heart . . .

'And other people take everything to their stomachs,' she finished for me, 'like the holothurians.'

We stopped at a cafeteria (accent on *ri*-a out here) and Daphne ate exactly as much as I did, and as usual enjoyed it exactly as much. I tell her she stands as pat as the Republican Party; that she is normalcy sublimated and humanized.

But she wouldn't look at Albuquerque, not with such a post-office! What could you expect, she said, of the present administration! And especially in this State of New Mexico! I agreed with her absolutely, and hastened with her out of the town.

It was smooth sailing after that, clear into Los Lunas,

which place we reached near noon, having been spoken on the run by only a lone Indian, picturesquely dressed and standing on the top of a long hill against the sky, waving a piece of pottery, which he had for sale, as a signal for us to stop and trade.

Running on through the town to the filling station at the division of the trails, we stopped for fuel and advice; for here one road runs south by way of Socorro and the petrified forest to Holbrook, the other keeps on due west by way of Grants and Gallup to Holbrook at the edge of one of the 'painted deserts.'

Daphne thought it was a great pity that we couldn't go the two ways and see both of the interesting places at once. In fact we could not go by the Socorro way at all on account of the snow. That trail was blocked, no one had broken through it since the storm, and Daphne, who had manifested no particular interest in stone trees up till now, was bent on the snow-bound route, declaring that those petrified trees would live forever in her memory as regret.

But it wasn't the petrified trees, it was the closed, forbidden road, which lured her. Nothing gets hold of Daphne's fancy like a piece of highway shut off by a hurdle or a détour sign.

We took the broken road, which for forty-five miles beyond Los Lunas was flawless and free from snow. It must be like this the rest of the way to California, I mused, for it was all wild mountain country from now on, and why should they run a road of this wide, graveled, and well-graded character into this nowhere unless they ran it through?

Crossing the Santa Fe railroad tracks a few miles out of Los Lunas, we seemed to sail up to Rio Puerco station across the Puerco River and on, with the railroad tracks now one side of us, now the other, and on both sides space immeasurable and mountains looming purple in the golden afternoon; on through an old Indian town, on and on, the high altitude of the land, the sparkle of the air, the swift freedom of the car, and the extraordinary difference in the landscape from anything which we had ever been so near to heretofore, quite indescribably unreal.

Then real mud. No, the mud was the stuff of dreams, not the black stuff of Iowa, not the red stuff of Virginia, not the gray stuff of Maine, but dream stuff of New Mexico, too terrible to be real. The mixture was compounded of mountain muck, bog peat, lava boulders, ruts and snow; bottomless in places, but always with a chunk of sunken rock which at least one wheel could touch and climb up on for a panting rest while the other wheels wallowed on.

Here other cars came up behind us. We could see them hopping off the hard road into the slough as the Gadarene pigs ran down the hill into the sea. Fords, and cars like mine, could swim it, but the heavy cars sank at once and ceased their struggles till we should send them a team of horses for a tow.

We were climbing a vast tableland, really crossing the great humped back of the Rockies, the elevation of the morass through which we were fighting not much below six thousand feet. We could not see the altitude, though we could hear it in our ears and feel it in our tingling blood. So continental in its proportions here is this Con-

tinental Divide that the traveler by automobile can scarcely realize that he is going over it. Of dizzy places, dreadful verges, awful walls there are none through here. Mount Taylor lies a little northward, somewhat more than eleven thousand feet in the air, but as your trail, and the wide face of your world, hangs between six and seven thousand feet in the same ambient air, with peaks and domes and ranges for your landmarks, you have small sense of height, and often none at all, especially where the road winds along between high escarpments which shut one in with the opposite feeling of shadow and profound depths, and exile from the sky.

CHAPTER XVII

OUT OF THE SAGEBRUSH

A KEEN wind was hunting the plateau. Spears and needles of ice were shooting from the edge of the water-filled ruts and the pools. The beckoning sun was still two hours high, and we had need to follow fast, for it was growing very cold here along the ridgepole of the Great Divide.

In a little while, I told Daphne (a little while is not in her philosophy), and we should have a hard enough road. As the going was we could have used a paddle-wheel behind as well as chains, and pontoon attachments to the running-boards. Banging from pit to pit, scraping and stubbing on hub and axle, our ship drawing too much water, we tacked and yawed, working her keel free from reef and bar, fearing every fresh puddle would be our last. These boggy mountain meadows were excessively trying to nerves, especially to Daphne's.

The long twilight had begun while Grants, the first place at which we might tie up for the night, was still ten miles distant, and, at our present rate of speed, fully two hours away. And so it proved. We did exactly five miles to the hour from here on to Grants, the shades of real night falling over that Alpine village when we hove to, and dropped anchor for the day.

Daphne said she wished to pick out the room. I tried to warp the car up to the 'hotel' steps in order to save her shoes, but failed. She had to wade. I was too inert to appreciate the good points of the town of Grants as they

spread before me in the wide gloom. The village seemed terribly remote and forlorn, a string of grizzly desert houses parallel with the trail and the Santa Fe track. I remember feeling that God never got off here, but always went through in a limited train. Then I must have nodded a moment. A cord in my neck burned like fire. Daphne was taking an interminable time! The muscles of my shoulders seemed to be torn from the bones. My eyes smarted with watching for Daphne. I was cramped and hungry. My head was so heavy that it sank of its own weight upon the steering wheel. I could have slept through a surgical operation, but so strong had become the fear upon me of going to sleep at the wheel that I was wide awake in a minute.

And the car was still awake, throbbing softly as we waited. How the creature had behaved! In and out of ruts, over the hubs through mire and muck, up on rocks and down into chuck holes, swaying, twisting, pitching, ploughing ahead with churning wheels, yet never a skipped beat of that valiant, pulsing heart! The thing seemed sentient. How else could it know how to pick its way so cannily? To meet so adequately the constant exigency of the trail, with just the grit and power necessary to pull out unstrained and undismayed! How wholly admirable! Such magnificent courage, such instant adaptability, such infinite capacity for its destined road!

Daphne must have come across a department store or become mired somewhere in the mud, else why didn't she return?

As I sat there slowly stiffening in the winter dusk atop of the continental watershed, the rivers behind me all sons

of the Atlantic, the rivers before me all daughters of the wide Pacific, I ran back over the long course from Hingham, and forward across the sweep of space to Santa Barbara. What was life all about, anyway? Where did we come from and where were we going? And *where* was Daphne! I was hardly more than physical remains, and, except for misery, a spiritual blank. Yet I was resentfully conscious of the crooning car. When it had turned as many years as I, and over as rough a road, its wrist-pins would rattle, its steering-knuckles loosen, its universal joints would know the sacro-iliac tortures which affected mine.

I was never throttled farther down, yet the engine in my breast throbbed on, even as that one throbbing under the mud-caked, frozen hood. Both machines had traveled far, one on a non-stop run out of Hingham, the other out of nowhere, and registering nothing but numbers on a dial, mere miles, unwearied by the miles elapsed, unmindful of the miles to come, intact from forward spring-pivot bolt to rear-light bulb, no nut worked loose, not a leaping spark within the heated cylinders failing now to fire!

Then Daphne appeared and climbed into the car.

'We're going on,' she said.

'We can't go on,' I said.

'Then we'll have to sleep out here,' she answered. And I started on.

'Every room in this place is taken, except one, and the bed in that one is full of plaster, with more on the ceiling ready to let go and fall. We'll have to drive on to Thoreau, thirty miles ahead.'

A man on horseback plashed up to the store.

'Can we get through to Thoreau?' I enquired.

'You sure can if you don't get stuck,' was his heartening reply.

There was a faint glitter of light among the fresh tin cans and broken bottles bordering the great Santa Fe Trail as it passed through the town of Grants, and beyond these meager decorations, either side, a fainter light, dim, diffused, mixed with the gray sage to the borders of the world.

'Why don't you go on?' asked Daphne, as the rider disappeared within the store.

'I was just thinking of Hingham,' I sighed.

'But it's Thoreau, you must think about!'

'I can't. I never heard of the place before, so there's nothing I can think about it. But Hingham now — the open fire — the poster bed — if ever I get back alive to Hingham . . .'

'If ever you do,' she laughed, 'you'll tell the children . . . Goodness! What a Wayside Tale you'll . . .

> Listen, my children, and you shall know
> Of the midnight ride into Thoreau.'

'The accent doesn't fall on that last syllable in Thoreau. The Concord way is *Thor*-eau.'

'Of course! So you will say it,

> Listen, my children, for you *must* know,
> Of *my* midnight ride into *Thor*-eau.

But do start along, for your car is freezing fast in this mud. You simply must step on it.'

I did step on it. I stood on it. I hung to it, quite insensible, once under way, of any new pains. I think I was suffering all the pains there are.

A section of new state road was being projected through here, and the old trail, cut to pieces by the construction work and the weather, ran off through the sage everywhere, making it exceedingly difficult to follow. But the mud was hardening all the time to our greater progress.

'What did you mean this morning, out of Santa Fe, by something's happening to Santa Barbara, or Hingham?' asked Daphne.

'Suppose an earthquake, or a tidal wave, or the . . .'

'Don't be so terribly plausible, please! "Or the Day of Judgment"? Was that the third probability? My dear, when the Day of Judgment hits Hingham and Santa Barbara, it is not going to overlook Santa Fe. Santa Fe is wonderful. But let's go on to Santa Barbara, seeing it's all downhill the rest of the way. And as for dear old Hingham they have never had a cosmic disturbance of any proportions in Hingham. She'll be there when we return.'

'Who said we were going to return?' But we were now coming into Bluewater, and in enormous letters, that showed like rock inscriptions in the dark, I made out the word HOTƎL (with the 'E' reversed) on the side of a one-story house that looked as tall to me as the Ritz-Carlton (which I really never saw!).

'Bluewater!' cried Daphne. 'How lovely!' Will you kindly pull up to that H-O-T-Ǝ-L door.'

We had come about twelve miles from Grants, all within an hour, and, in spite of the dark, the clock was still short of seven, and the supper at the Mortensen House just short of fully served. And what a supper Sister Mortensen did put on!

The Mortensens are Mormons and unmitigated ro-

mances. Elder Mortensen was a prosperous rancher in Mexico before his colony was raided by the bandit Villa, the settlement razed, all crops, stock, and possessions seized, and the plundered people driven for their lives back into Texas. Those who escaped were scattered. Mortensen, a born scout, knowing the border as well as Villa knew it, brought his entire family out alive, but not a mule, or a change of clothing for them, or a single dollar in coin. And here they were in Bluewater; and he was sheriff; and she was the proprietor of the Mortensen House.

I must say for the Mortensen House that it was better than it looked, though, of course, we saw it in the dark. The next time I motor through I shall wire ahead for reservations, and pray that *two* sheets be put on the bed, and that nobody be allowed to sleep between them until I have gone. And there shall be two sheets for every bed next time, for the Mortensens were foreordained for prosperity.

And I shall wire Mrs. Mortensen to have another roast lamb for supper, one of her own flock, absolutely; and more of those baking-powder biscuits which she cooks on the *top* of the stove — when the oven is too crowded, as it was the night we were taken in with such generous hospitality out of the sagebrush, and the wind, and the bitter dark.

CHAPTER XVIII

PASSES THE SANTA FE FREIGHT

For one so far gone I was a big surprise to those biscuits. I still feel a bit shy of conscience at the bill I paid Mrs. Mortensen because it barely covered the biscuits, and there besides was the roast lamb with apple sauce. Really I never tasted such apple sauce. Daphne tried to get my eye, she said, all through the meal, for I behaved as if I had never tasted anything before; that I should wait on some ceremony, even among the Mormons of Bluewater. I waited upon all the ceremony that I saw, which was Mrs. Mortensen bringing in more and more biscuits.

Quite myself by the end of the supper, I gave over the purpose of going immediately to my room, joining the circle about the hot stove instead. The fact is I was in some uncertainty if I went to bed just how to manage the solitary sheet. So I asked Daphne on the quiet whether I should get under it or on it, and she plainly intimated that if I would look after my automobile and leave the housekeeping of the trip to her, I might be saved some fool questions, not to mention other things which might be more than embarrassing in a situation like this.

'Sheets are a delicate matter here in Bluewater, possibly,' she said, in a hushed aside, 'and you're not the person to handle them. You see this storm has caused a run on sheets. Some of the guests won't have any at all, I suppose — the two cowboys, for instance. We're in good luck to have one even on a night like this away up here.

But the girls are ironing an extra one for us in the kitchen. And don't say anything if it is a bit damp, for it will be sweet and clean.'

It was first come, first served, at the Mortensen — two sheets, or one, or a blanket on the floor. Mrs. Mortensen never turned a traveler away, not at this season of the year, for if she did, that traveler before morning would be begging Saint Peter to let him in out of the cold and the interminable sage.

And once in the Mortensen House it was all yours, from the red-bellied stove to a place under the small oil lamp at the cleared dining-table, where the Mortensen children, in the hubbub of general conversation, were trying to do their sums.

They were such gentle children, silent, and quick and resourceful, and tremendously concerned with their books! And such concentration! The extraordinary barriers to education set up by this desert situation must crumble before the determined attack of these eager minds. Well-mannered, well-nurtured, well-spoken, they were going to be well-educated here on the top of the great watershed, living springs, flowing east and west, as the rivers here, to water our towns and cities between the ocean shores.

In what other land could a similar situation exhibit an educational parallel? From the cloistered walks of Saint Paul's in cultured old Concord to this cruelly raw spot in the sagebrush on the bleak, wind-blown top of the Divide, the education of Young America goes on, only to fail in the end unless the children of Bluewater have the very lessons assigned in Saint Paul's; and unless the boys of Saint Paul's are taught to read and understand the story of Bluewater,

written in twisted, sagebrush characters, on the vast gray page of the plains.

Bluewater is not exceptional in the United States, though its school coach, which gathers the children daily, does not yet pick up every citizen-child. But I heard of one great county in Texas where, two years ago, there were only three school children, who yet had their American Public School, and their trained teacher, with the Stars and Stripes unfurled to the breeze above their building every day, as every day every young American should see it unfurled above his country's greatest and most national institution, where the most national and most momentous of his country's tasks is going forward — the making of the peculiar, the democratic, the American mind.

'Pull up! Pull up!' said Elder Mortensen, edging over with his chair in order to make room for us in the circle about the red-hot stove. Mrs. Mortensen had rustled that extra sheet by this time, but I was no longer sleepy, and pulled up, as invited, into the barbecue and the sizzling circle of talk. Then Mrs. Mortensen joined us with her married daughter's new baby, a little peach of a Mormon, the very purest of the Latter-Day Saints. You should have seen Daphne swoop down on that doctrine of Mormon and gather it in! Its young mother was still at work over the heap of dishes in the kitchen just through the open door. Nothing of our conversation was lost in the kitchen, though much of the kitchen comment was lost to us, if I could judge by the occasional gale of laughter between the two sisters over the sink.

Besides Daphne and myself and the baby, and the baby's father, and Elder and Mrs. Mortensen, the circle about the

stove held a neighbor who had come in to talk, two young cattlemen who had ridden their horses into Bluewater that day from thirty-five miles across the sage, and an ex-soldier lad, back from the trenches with T.B., and assigned, in his vocational training, to the railroad station here to learn telegraphy.

He was a Massachusetts boy, and when he discovered the Massachusetts number plate on my car, as he came over late from the station, he would have died if joy could have killed him.

'Do you know Roxbury?' he cried, looking at me as he might have gazed upon a vision.

'Do I? Do you know Hingham?'

'Do I? Why I have fished for smelts there! I have an aunt living there! Do you know such-and-such a store on Tremont Street?'

'Why, man,' I cried, 'I trade there!'

'Good Lord!' he cried. 'My father works there' — and grabbing me about the neck, tears of homesickness streaming down his cheeks, the boy began to whoop and dance like a native Hopi, the power of articulation gone, as utterly inadequate to express this poignant, elemental pain.

The ranchers were a lively couple, as full of pointed talk as a prickly-pear is of needles, picturesque talk, too, pure native literature. In a cañon on their ranch were the remains of a pueblo of ancient cliff-dwellers which they invited me to go home with them to see. Between them in the sage, on their way to Bluewater, they had roped a coyote, the little wolf of the plains, and their story of how the cunning rascal ducked and tricked, and put two trained,

determined ponies and two skilled lariats to confusion, was better than a book. And then the smell of the horse upon them! And the feel of the horse beneath them! It sent my blood to cantering. The thudding hoofs! The working shoulders at my knees! The pricked ears forward! The slap of the sage against my *tapaderos!* The swing, the cut, the reel, as the intelligent ponies head off the racing wolf and round him for the swirling loop!

I was sick for the sage.

The leather chaps and the peaked felt sombreros of the two cowboys hung on pegs against the near wall, but their fancy-stitched, high-heeled riding-boots were thrust forward toward the stove, strange, spurred footgear out of the stirrups! Strange, too, were the men thus accoutered — strange even at a place like Mortensen's, for here the continental motorists and the continental trains kept passing, but these two men seemed out of an earlier time, and out of a world apart.

Of the continental band rounded up at Dodge City, and keeping more or less together since, Daphne and I only had got as far as Bluewater. The mercury had been dropping steadily since noon. It was going to be a cold night. We wondered about the Sourdoughs, and where the knightly paint-and-oil man and his son might be; and we hoped the ragged old car of the bedquilts, with its silent, suffering freight, was not stalled somewhere in the morass on the thither side of Grants.

The evening wore along, and the talk about the stove kept pace with it, showing no sign of slack. Remarkably little of it was local. The two cattlemen kept strictly to the range, and a story now and then by Mortensen, the county

sheriff, was washed with blue water. That any of it was local is to be wondered at, for what was there inside of the house, or outside under the cold canopy of the stars, that could be called local? There is not enough of Bluewater itself to be so considered, though it is on the map, a map containing more unclaimed, unlocalized earth, and more unsearchable heaven — more of the universal — than I had ever found myself at the center of before.

A moderate wind was blowing, and taking its part in the general conversation, talking all around the house at once. Suddenly there came a lull. A perceptible tremor, a jar like a faint earthquake, shook the house, followed immediately by a low rumbling, growing stronger and louder, as distinctly now in the distance could be heard the coming of the Santa Fe freight.

The telegraph operator looked at his watch. The two cowboys looked at each other. The young mother of the baby reached over and took the sleeping thing from Daphne's arms. The sheriff bent his head and listened. Then the station agent slipped the watch into his pocket, got up and went outside, pulling the door hard to against the wind, and I caught a glimpse of a long clanking shadow lumbering slowly against the stars.

As the mighty music died away, the door opened, the agent returned, said good-night, and left the room, his day at an end, something serene and satisfied in his countenance at the passing of the train, as if one heard him calling along his wire, 'The Ten O'clock has passed Bluewater, and all is well with the Santa Fe!'

It was time for the whole house to go to bed, and I was about to step outside for a look at the car, standing in the

open near the door, when the door was pushed from the outside, and there, blinking at the light in the room, stood a stranger, a boy of twenty, perhaps, tall, and as ruddy and fair as a young David. He had a small bundle in his hand.

'Can I have a bed?' he drawled with a soft Southern color to his words.

'How many of you?' asked Mrs. Mortensen, her motherly eye taking in the modest, open-faced prodigal from his auburn hair to his muddy boots.

'One,' was the answer.

'Come in, stranger.' And the boy, dropping his small bundle behind the door, took the chair the Roxbury boy from Massachusetts had just vacated, and reached out his numbed hands and feet to the fire.

'Where d'ye blow in from?' asked the sheriff Mortensen.

'Austin.'

'Drop off that freight?'

The lad nodded.

'What for?' eyeing him with interest.

'Work. Bottom's out of Texas. There's a better country.'

And Daphne, her face working with pity, a strange, starry light in her eyes, got up abruptly, and, taking the boy by the hand, said with a thrill in her voice:

'You're right, my son! Everlastingly right! There *is* a better country. And if you don't find it here, perhaps you'll find it in Santa Barbara, where we are looking for it.' And lifting a candle from the table she was gone.

'"And if you don't find it here,"' I said to myself, as I stood beneath the stars. '"If you don't find it here"?'

The wind was strengthening. The stars were snapping

in the blue-black sky. The cold was growing intense. At midnight it fell to zero. Already the car was locked in a frozen grip beyond the power of any thieving hands. But few are the thieves who prowl through this barred land. Every stranger here is going somewhere, and it is known where he is going. He may drop off the trucks of a through freight at midnight in the smallest hamlet on the highest curve of the Continental Divide, only to drop into the hands of the sheriff. The one poor hiding-place in this Southwestern country is a grave. Every traveler enters through a pass, and his only exit is through a pass, where one like Mortensen could take a thousand.

Covering the apples in the car and locking the doors out of habit, I moved over toward the station. All there was of Bluewater stood close about me, a pack-rat village of half a dozen flimsy houses, heaped here in a nest amid the brush. An overwhelming and fiercely black and brilliant sky glared down upon me and Bluewater. Were we, somehow, an insult to the seeing stars, huddled but unhidden here, high along the crest of the world?

The wind swished past with a sting that humbled me, and that rankled in me, too. How hardly tolerant! One slap of its wide hand and every shack would flatten beneath the lowly sage! One crook of its careless finger and the splinters of Bluewater would fly like a rider's dust across the plain!

But there was a steady glitter along the shining rails of the Santa Fe. Spiked in their bedded place, the twin bands of steel, binding the Great Lakes with the terminal seas, bent over the Continental Divide without a knot at Bluewater. I stood the straighter against the wind for the quiet

grip of those reaching rails. Except for a glimmer in Mortensen's Hotel as I turned back, all Bluewater was asleep; and the Santa Fe in its ballasted bed was asleep; and the Continental Divide in the blue-curtained bed of the starlit sky was asleep. But the boy from Texas, seeking that Better Country, dear God, I wondered, if he could ever get to sleep?

CHAPTER XIX

THE PAINTED DESERT

Drowsily I thought it was Jersey's cold nose as my hand came into contact with it. Then, wider awake, I remembered that the dear old dog was back in Boston with one of the boys. 'Good Heavens!' I said, now fully awake. 'It's my own nose! And it must be frozen! Where are we? What time is it? There isn't the slightest sensation in the end of my nose! How unspeakably cold!' Some one was moving about in the dark room. It was Daphne up and dressing. Oh, why did I marry a farmer's daughter that I must always get up in the dark? Then I heard the Mortensens moving about in the living-room.

Zero is a mighty poor term for the positive, petrifying cold in our corner of the Mortensen House. There was no cellar under our floor, nothing but the sand of the desert, and the wind. The little rag rug for us to say our prayers on was so chill and nervous that it kept rising up and flopping all about the floor. I had seen the carpets 'walk' on Mullein Hill; I had felt it cold on Mullein Hill, so cold that I had even said my prayers in bed instead of on my miserable knees. But that was in Massachusetts. Here we were in New Mexico, three thousand miles along the road to The Better Country! And the bonds and debentures of that country 'went off' in a dreadful slump. I pulled the covers over my head and knew for a certainty that every Hingham apple in the car was as hard frozen as a brickbat.

Then Daphne took a hand with the covers. 'Don't you

smell the bacon?' as she shook me. 'Hurry! Get up! Perhaps we shall never be on the Continental Divide for another sunrise. Let's get out on the top of the world! It will be a memorable dawn!'

I had seen so many memorable dawns! Never one from 'the top of the world,' to be sure, nor ever one, that I could remember, from my bed. I'm as fond of them as Daphne is, but I am perfectly willing to pass them around. Daphne is jealous of everything coming to her. The dawn goes with her day, and she wants it, just as she wants the box with the laundry, and the trimmings off the bottoms of the boys' trousers, and the cuffs of their shortened coats. 'Put in all the scraps,' she tells the alteration man impressively — for future patches, she imagines, but really because they are *her* part of the suit. She has enough boxes of tight little rolls of trousers trimmings to go into the tailor business — as partner with the Tailor of Gloucester. 'I've *had* to patch,' she exclaims, 'upon your college salary, and scrape, too! A family is a going concern, and somebody has *got* to make it go. But I suppose I might just as well give up now.'

What would happen to me if she did! If we never reach The Better Country it won't be for lack of push and pull by Daphne. Witness our rising at Bluewater! And our sitting down the very day we were married! That event took place one Sunday afternoon in the pine woods along the banks of the Kennebec, after I had preached a sermon in the morning, and delivered a Sunday-School talk at noon. As we were strolling up to the farmhouse from the pines, Daphne said to me, 'Now we have two whole hours before the wedding supper which the Pratts are going to give us. Let's get your writing started early. I'll take care

of the people and you slip away and have a whole hour with your thoughts.'

Little did she dream, sweet thing, how deadly afraid I was right then to spend a whole hour alone with my thoughts. But I did it. That's when the writing started. The blessed pen took me away from my thoughts. Since then I have repeatedly asked Daphne when she thinks the writing ought to stop. She drops her hands into her lap, and says I haven't done anything bad enough to justify my stopping yet, and if she hasn't lost heart, she doesn't see that I ought to. So up I got at Bluewater and began again to journey toward The Better Country where I am going to write a truly great book.

But it required the combined efforts of both of us. I am no match for myself alone. I am not like Pilgrim's Progress. He could go it alone. He left his wife, or just deserted her. And he deserted his city — a thought which worries me a good deal as I think of Hingham. If Pilgrim had stayed by his wife, the two of them working together might have cleaned up their city and made it reasonably celestial. I wondered a good deal about that after leaving Bluewater. Anyhow, I tell Daphne that when I come to the Celestial City, I will find her in it. And if I come to Heaven ahead of her, I will wait outside until she arrives.

One of the Mortensen emergency children was sound asleep on a settee in the dining-room when we sat down to breakfast, having been routed out of his snug bed, probably, by some midnight arrival. The savory smells of frying bacon and fresh-ground coffee, the clash of dishes, the clatter of chairs, and the miracle of the dawn on the Continental Divide were all lost to him.

Perhaps one of our Dodge City cars had got in after we went to bed. But mine was the only machine outside. With a cold-chisel and hammer I chipped the wheels free of their frozen clutch, thawed out the brakes with boiling water, and was off magnificently with Daphne and her dawn.

But not without a certain regret at leaving Bluewater. I was deeply impressed with the Mortensens, and especially with their pivotal position. For propagandists like them the place was wonderful. Exactly upon the crest of the Continental Divide, along the only trans-oceanic route open, at that time, to motorists the year around, an officer of the law, host to the traveling public, social center of a vast sagebrush community, diversified as to occupation and family, a proselyter by ordination, with a world-wide religious zeal, what need had Mortensen to be hurrying everywhere? Could he improve the strategy of his position by moving out of Bluewater, say, to Santa Barbara? I wondered as we moved away if Mortensen could find a better country.

We took literature away with us from Bluewater, a book and pamphlets on Mormonism. And in spite of myself I have been something of a Latter Day Saint ever since, not so much because of the literature as because of Elder Mortensen. The Book of Mormon speaks for a queer religion, but the man Mortensen wasn't queer. He was human and likable. He was baffling, too. For as I live he had seen other foreign lands than Mexico, met other men than cowboys and tourists, and talked to other, larger congregations than the one drawn close about the stove under his low roof that night in Bluewater.

But Daphne says, as for her, she's glad the laws of the Mormons have been amended so as to prohibit plural marriages and make it safe now for us to travel among them. And I tell her, remembering Abraham and Sarah, that I am as relieved by the amendment as she is.

Our flinty trail was no better than a bed of lava rock when we set out, a scoriaceous thing, so we took literally 'to the brush,' wherever the wire-fence borders and tin-can trimmings of the road allowed us. Picking our way among the brush and humps and rocks, we passed Baca (not a valley here), and, by the time thawing had begun, had climbed the last of the seven thousand feet into Thoreau to find ourselves upon the actual summit of the Divide.

Eleven miles across from Thoreau extends this seven thousand-foot tableland to the edge of the slow drop toward the Pacific. Raton Pass is higher by seventeen hundred and ninety feet, and incomparably wilder and more scenic. It is the immense width of the Divide, the fact that it is the backbone of the continent, at once the national roof and continuous wall dividing and uniting two climatic worlds, that quickens your breath and starts the blood to pounding in your ears.

Allow all you can to elevation. Refuse, if you can, to be stirred by distance. Discount mere bulk, the crude quantity of the land, with its tedious train of time for all who travel. Select your scenery from the choicest of the world. Then start from Bluewater, on the eastern flank of the Continental Divide, for Gallup on the rim of the western descent, and you have fifty motor miles of *summit* coming to you, barren, wind-swept, tremendous miles of

gray sage and painted cliffs of clay and colored sandstone, mesas, buttes, black cones and craters, sculptured cañons, lava beds and cloudy ranges faintly washed against a narrow cirque of sky.

It is not choice. It is titanic. It is not Swiss, or English, or Italian. It is New Mexican and American, and higher than Helicon, peopled with more and mightier muses, who wait for one to bring them a mightier, American pen.

The country here belongs, both past and present, to the Indians. After leaving South Guam the road cuts through the reservation of the Zuñi Tribe. We were in Gallup by noon, where, if Fate had stopped us, I should have been content to stay. Gallup can never escape the winds of winter and the winds of summer, the drifting snows and the drifting sands of its heroic clime. But it is the center of an ancient culture, of more human history and untold story than, perhaps, any other American town.

Fortunately for me I was traveling through a picture without foregrounds, all of the details quite buried in the snow. Most of the birds and small animals were driven to quarters from the cold. Two months later I should have lost the landscape entirely in little dens and burrows by the road, in horned toads and scorpions, and cactus blooms. This was the right season for one who thinks he must go through to Santa Barbara. Four months later and I should never have got as far as Gallup. For I am not one who could leave even Hingham after April's there.

To the north of us lay the Navajo Reservation; to the south, Fort Wingate and the Zuñi villages. Not far away in Chaco Cañon were the half-buried pueblos and tenantless cliff houses of an extinct civilization. And on this, as

on some old palimpsest, was being written in the San Juan Plains with concrete dams and netted irrigation ditches, the story of a new civilization.

Nothing happened to detain us in Gallup. Fate has consistently passed me by. An habitation awaited us at Santa Barbara, a garnished lodge that was swept and dusted, with a garden and a gardener, and hedges of Cherokee roses, and shadowed walks beneath the overhanging live-oaks, and everlasting sunshine, and Astrid's, dear Astrid's welcome for us, a presence fairer than the roses, a spirit more loving and constant than the sunshine, and closer, though the wide Atlantic separated us, and years had come between.

We filled up on gasoline in Gallup, and gasoline was all we carried away, unless we name the desire, which still lingers, to return to Gallup and stay. The town needed more inhabitants, having, perhaps, more unbuilt suburbs than any other place I had ever seen. Daphne thought it might be a very dusty place to keep house in. I liked the atmosphere of leisure imparted to it by the Indians. Not one of them seemed to have any place to go, and yet he seemed to have all eternity in which to make the trip. Not an Indian in Gallup ever thrust his wrist watch from beneath his sleeve, pulled into high, and stepped on the gas, whooping, 'Me for my two papooses and the seven-forty train in Los Angeles, the twenty-third morning of the Christmas moon!' The dawn of day is not their conscience.

Not since leaving Los Lunas had we seen any of our fellow pilgrims, but here in Gallup were the Sourdoughs, the Knight and his Squire, and the miserable car of the bedquilts. Each had a story to tell of getting into Grants:

a glum, sour story by the Sourdoughs; a modest story, all warm with praise for the skillful driving of the son, by the Knight; a tale of broken springs, high price of gas, cold and muck and cumbering family by the unnatural, fur-coated merchant, who complained of everything, and blamed everybody, especially his hollow-chested son and God.

Daphne cheered them all with the thought of the land now sloping toward perpetual summer! The winter of our discontent was gone; and I must say that I crossed the basins and the 'washes' now with a thrill at the thought of their waters, when they had them, rushing westward into the Little Colorado, on into the cañon of the Great Colorado, on into the Gulf of California, and thence into the western sea.

We came to the Arizona line and shot across. But nothing happened. Neither of us had spoken of it, yet we were both keyed to strange expectancy as we drew near the Arizona line, as if we might be met by giant-armed cacti, Gila monsters, alkali flats, Apaches, and chances to die a thousand deaths at poison springs and in the smoking sands.

Instead it was more snow, identical with the snow of New Mexico, Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, and Idaho, with never a palm tree, nor a sand storm, nor a very wild Indian, nor a giant sahuaro to stop us. But the sky was large and glorious. Limitless reaches of rimrock and tableland set a stupendous stage for us, and our swinging craft, coasting nearer heaven than earth, rose and fell toward a crimson sunset over a road across the clouds.

By and by we bore northward and climbed out upon a plain and into a stirless silence and such utter loneliness as

we had felt nowhere in this silent, lonely land. The snow had thinned and faded quite away up here. We halted a moment at a sign reading, 'To the Petrified Forest' — away off to the left. Daphne heaved a little sigh. 'Next time,' she said, and we moved on, soon halting again before another sign reading, 'The Painted Desert.'

Leaving the car, we went over and stood upon the verge of the unearthly scene. The moment was perfect. In the failing light the profound depths and sculptured, frescoed forms — pinnacle, spire, and dome, columns and walls of color, merging far off in a veil of their own faint lines and misty tones — It is futile to try! Daphne slipped her hand into mine, as if that, somehow, might give her support and lessen the pain of it all, transfusing it thus from herself to me.

We watched the purple flood well up and wash the ochreous clays, blot out the walls of malachite, the ruby pillars, and the lower turrets of gold, until the flowing sapphire was lapping at the mighty brim, and we, without a bark, already stood too deep within the overwhelming sea.

Daphne turned and fled. Within the little cabin of the car we began the long drift into Holbrook, with now and then a climb so sharp that we needed all the power we had.

It was all through a soft eerie twilight. A loaded truck lay broadside to at the bottom of a steep descent, its boxes, bags, and tins of fruit a heap of wreckage in the gully below, a bit of flotsam on the gray waters of the sage and sand. These lumbering ships of the desert sail a dangerous sea.

And now it was night. Far away below us gleamed the

tiny lights of Holbrook, and, steering by them, we soon swung down into port, and came to anchor after an uneventful run from Bluewater, if there is such a thing in anybody's voyaging as an uneventful run.

CHAPTER XX

THE RED CHIEF

About the base-burner in the hotel were gathered more of our Dodge City pilgrims than had come together at any other point along the route. And how friendly they looked, even Sourdough, for he nodded; and Mrs. Sourdough, for she smiled at me, and I smiled back at her. Really a nice sort of woman, and a mighty pretty woman in spite of her pants (I insist on the term).

'What a handsome Indian!' I whispered to Daphne. 'I'll go over and see if I can talk with him.' He was sitting somewhat apart, a straight, upstanding young fellow, who was looking on, but with no particular interest in the white-man scene. He was ready enough to talk, and it transpired, as our conversation lengthened, that he was a graduate of the Roosevelt Indian School, and now its truant officer, the largest, most important administrative job connected with an Indian school.

He was himself, certainly, proof most convincing that the Indians of the Southwest can be thoroughly educated. If port and voice and manner are the signs of culture, then the young officer had more than the average American's share. His lack of interest was only apparent; his sitting apart, his immobile face, only the natural reserve of his kind. His dress, like his education, was thoroughly modern and American, but neither education nor dress, nor anything the Government could force upon him was modern enough and American enough to change his Indian blood.

He was still only an Indian, a buck Indian, a full-blooded Apache chief by tribal rights, antedating the rights of the white Government now a guardian over him. The ungrateful savage was disgruntled at it all. What does the heathen want, you say? It is hard to tell what any of us really wants, but in the course of our talk (I wrote it down immediately as close to actual form as I could put it) he said:

'They [the Government officers] came to my father's house and captured me for the school. My father said it was the law, I must go. They would never see me again, they said. Now they do not wish to see me. They fear me to come back. I will marry a daughter of my tribe, with my white man's education, my white man's needs, but no white man's work or place. Why don't the white man, who makes me take his education, let me take his daughter for my wife and his job for my job? What do you say to that? No, this white-man business is bad business for the red man. White man's education for the red man's mind, white man's ways in red man's village, white man's daughter in red man's house, white man's religion in red man's heart — all bad, rotten!'

I could say nothing, so, not being interrupted, he went on:

'We are Indians. The Government cannot make us white men. We are out of the desert. Our ways are desert ways. Our baskets, our blankets, our pots, our tools, our farms, our ponies are all of the desert. Our houses are desert houses of adobe. Desert, adobe, Indian — and they must be, they cannot be different. We cannot be different and be here. White men can't train red men for the desert.

We are old here. We have always been here. This is our country. It is right for us. We are right for it. If you give us a different education, you must give us a different country to go with it. But we don't want a different country nor a different religion. Our God is here. He is Indian like us. We know. He made us. We must be like him. He like us. There is but one God you say? True. And he is here and everywhere. Indian here with the Indians. White with you white people. Leave us to worship with our Indian drums and dances in the spirit of the desert. The desert spirit is his spirit. It is a beautiful good spirit.'

I answered him nothing, because there was nothing to answer. But I was sure, though I may have been mistaken, that I saw, beneath the collar of his shirt as he talked, something like a rosary. Would the zealous *padre* who put it there, I wondered, go as far with the Indian and his God as to wear the Indian's beaded prayer girdle of buckskin, and take part in his solemn, ceremonial dance?

God had not left Himself without a witness on the mesas of Arizona, but how unthinkable that it should be the same witness as on Sinai or on the desert ways to Padan-aram! The priests of the Navajo, Yavapai, and Maricopa tribes could not understand the language of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I AM THAT I AM; that means the desert, in the Southwest — the yucca, the thorny cactus, the basking lizard, the Indian in his kiva tending the ceremonial fires.

'What has happened to you?' Daphne inquired, as I joined her a little later. 'Wasn't your Indian as nice as he looks?'

'I've seen many fat, lazy Indians, Daphne, but only a few white men with the dignity and quality of this young

red chief. He's terribly disquieting to talk to. He's a protest to things white and Christian; not that we can't give him something, though we can receive from him a great deal more. Why baptize him? Why Americanize him? Why demoralize him? Isn't the desert after its kind as distinctive and even as divine as the forest, the prairie, and the watered valleys after their kind? And isn't the Indian as distinctive and divine after his kind as the whitest of us? We need his mind and manners as much as he needs ours, and more just now. How priceless his tawny desert, his simple arts, his quiet philosophy, his constant and profound religion! We can give him science for his art, and exchange some of our religion for some of his to our mutual advantage, but in nothing can we afford to make him white, nor think to better him by such a fatal change.'

'I thought you weren't going to lecture any more,' she said. 'I must keep you away from Indians, I see that,' drawing me by the sleeve into the chair beside her. 'Tell me about him.'

'If only I were an Indian, Daphne!'

'I didn't ask you that. You wouldn't be an Indian for anything, though you are always wanting to be something else than you are. I'm glad I'm not a squaw.'

'Just so! That's exactly his grouch against Fate and the Government. He would like you for his squaw.'

'Me!'

'Well, a white woman, and you were the only one I could think of who would suit him.'

'What a perfectly delightful Indian! I must go over and speak to him, too. Really he is strikingly handsome! I

suppose, if one knew the spell of the desert, it wouldn't be so bad to be a squaw.'

'I must keep you away from the Indians, Daphne, I see that.'

She gave my hand a little squeeze, and went on:

'What were you going to say about being an Indian yourself?'

'Only this, that I wouldn't go a mile nearer Santa Barbara. This is their country, arid, blasted, terrible, but theirs, and sufficient, and what looks like the curse of God to us, to them is his mercy and the very beauty of his holiness. It is a land of little rain, and I love the green of the Hingham Hills, but this is a land of little need, to balance the scanty gifts, and I'm afraid of our needs in Santa Barbara. The Better Country won't be full of needs, Daphne. By that token we shall know when we have arrived. Aren't we going to live in two houses in Santa Barbara?'

'Live in one and *write* in the other, dear.'

'You can't do it, Daphne. The house you live in, that's the one, the only one, to write in. Why, it will be like putting you in one house and me in the other. You can't divorce life and writing. I don't know what we are going to do with two houses, Daphne. If only one of them were a barn!'

'And the gardener's lodge at the entrance!' she murmured, a subdued thrill in her voice, a dreamy, sweet light in her eyes. 'Just like a fairy tale! Would you wish the gardener's lodge were also a barn?'

We lapsed into the silence of our own unanswerable thoughts. Two minds with but a single thought has never been our monotonous and dreadful fate. If Daphne and I

never get anywhere in our arguments, it is a comfort to know that we shall never get any nearer done with them. Our two hearts beat as one, or near enough together to keep fair marital time; but thirty years together have not synchronized the workings of our minds, not enough, at least, to jeopardize our zest for each other.

It was not Daphne now but the Indian who disturbed me, for I agreed with him and was unhappy, as I always am when in too much concord. There are no good Indians but dead ones, I had been taught by the Government. Killing, robbing, hounding, jailing, and pauperizing the Indian has been one of the noble occupations of our democratic Government for much more than 'a century of dishonor.' I was used to that. But here was a new insult to the red man, this forcing upon him of an alien, mechanistic, materialistic education. How much better for us if we could go to school to him! Would that 'they' had taken me from my father's house to some Hopi school, or to some Zuñi, Moqui, Mohave, Hualpai, Pina, or Maricopa school of adobe in the Coconiño Forest, or yonder on the opposite wall of the Grand Cañon of the Colorado, or anywhere in this divine vastness and silence!

Then I should have known many deep things about God, and felt many deeper things than I know: how the Great Spirit led these red children for centuries in the mesquite wilderness, over the black, lava boulders, down the rimrock cañons, across the parched sands, under the blue, pouring air and pitiless sky; and how, far more to my need, how the Great Spirit kept them simple, and gave them so much beauty of hand and spirit, and held them so close to Himself, as close as breathing, all of their life being

religion, even to the planting and harvesting of their corn.

While I had been talking with the young Indian, Daphne had been sitting near the stove speaking with her Knight, the linseed-oil man. She now went up to her room, leaving me to bank the fires in my burning breast, for I felt too much like Popocatepetl to go to sleep. Soon there was nobody left in the room but the clerk and the Knight, besides myself, and I went over by the stove, for my feet were cold, a jealous habit of my feet when other members of me receive undue attention.

It had been a hard day's drive, and the Knight, the most sprightly and alert of us, plainly showed for it. He seemed very weary, even dejected, I thought.

'It's hard work, isn't it?' he said, as I slumped into my chair, his tired eyes bloodshot as they met mine kindly.

'But there are two of you to drive,' I answered. 'I do it all myself.'

He shook his head. 'Same in our car, only it's the boy who drives. He wants to. He needs to. I'm giving him the chance. But you know there are places on this trail where you had rather do your own driving, especially . . .'

'Especially,' I broke in significantly, the Knight nodding to complete the explanation. I began to understand what the father of the lad had been facing the last few days in order to let the boy drive. I doubt if I could have come through it all alive.

'Well, let's go to bed and forget it,' I said, getting to my unsteady feet.

'I can't — yet. The boy is still out. He disappeared as soon as he put up the car. I'll wait for him. Not a bad boy.

Just a little wild, that's all. And it's not his fault wholly either. He's never had a real mother. Nor a real father, for that matter,' he added bitterly. 'I've always been on the road. A boy needs a home. He needs parents and love. He'll have 'em all now, except —— Well, I'll be mother to him, too. Sold everything in Kansas City. Picked the hardest trip I could for him to handle. Got this car so we could go together, and when we get to the other end, to California, if he likes it there, we'll start all new, and start together.'

The clerk went up and left us. It was snowing hard again. The wind, playing rough-house with the town, was loudly banging at the big double doors of the hotel. So far as I could see, nothing outside was lighted except the Chinese restaurant on the diagonal corner across the street. I didn't know quite how to say good-night to the man by the stove. There were some things that, as a father, I had never experienced. There was nothing I could say, but I could keep him silent company. Then the wind seemed to blow the big doors wide open, and to blow the boy through them — from some little movie theater — breathless and snow-covered, straight into his father's arms!

The Knight rose and extended his hand. 'Thank you,' he said, and added, 'It doesn't pay to get overtired. Life's not so bad a thing, after all.' Laying a hand upon the lad's shoulder, he asked, 'Was it a good show, son?' the pair of them leaving me alone by the banked fire in the stove at the center of the empty, half-lighted room. Not quite alone, for there were dim, uneasy shadows behind me in the corners, shapes that slunk away when I thought of Daphne

asleep upstairs. I knew that she had tucked her four in their beds for the night. It was time for me now to bolt the doors.

She was sleeping, a tired child herself, she seemed, as I crept shivering into the room. Like the Knight she, too, had been driven all the long, dangerous day. But she had not exactly been silent, like the Knight, not on the bumps and skids. She was no shock absorber to store up the strains and show eyes of red at the end of the run.

'What time is it?' she murmured brokenly, so nearly inarticulate that I had to guess at the words.

'Eleven-thirty,' I replied.

'Did the Knight's boy come back?'

'Yes, Daphne, he's back and safe in his bed.'

She sighed, tried to say something about her own four and their beds, but slipped away into deep, sweet oblivion, God in his Heaven, and everything right in her maternal world.

The snow was sifting over her, and I stepped to the open window to draw it part-way down. There could scarcely be a blacker night, or a wilder. And such a rushing past of the winds! But out of the tumult and the smother of the dark I heard a clear voice saying, 'Life's not so bad a thing, after all! Not so bad a thing! Not so bad!'

CHAPTER XXI

THE JACK'S REVENGE

I FELL asleep to the tittle-tattle of sleet upon the window, wondering how much longer I should be made sport of by the winter; and what the boys would do in Los Angeles if we were marooned here in Holbrook; and was there a Better Country, anyway? Dawn overtook us on the road for Flagstaff, our doubts dispelled, the storm of the previous evening having been only a little rumpus of the elements, only a band of blustering rowdies galloping through the slumbering town.

Dawn overtook us, I say, though it was hardly a dawn, so overcast was the sky. The sculptured sandstone hills outside of Holbrook, one of that town's show places, were without their rich colors, the whole desert a study in dull browns. For desert travel, however, this subdued, diffused light was perfect. And what with the excellent road to Winslow, our spirits rose above the sagging lift, our faith returned, and, coursing to the outer borders of the immeasurable, strange world about us, made the ominous, impending silence a mere circumstance of our passing, so imperious, in the morning, is the march of man.

A big-eared rabbit sprang from his form beneath a yucca and, unlimbering his elastic legs, fell in beside us, as one who in honor would see us on our way. But I was haughty, and pressed him. Up from twenty to twenty-five miles I pushed him; to twenty-seven, twenty-eight by the speedometer, when the jack, throwing his limp ears from

side to side, looking wildly to leap from right to left, felt the breath of the wheels upon him, and, bucking in mortal fright, turned a comic legspring in the air, as the derisive car whizzed past, and with a vaunting hoot was gone. But the desert took her revenge.

Crossing the Little Colorado we ran into Winslow, the morning only at nine; and, angling through without a stop, bumped across the railroad tracks and swung off carelessly into a meadow. A fresh automobile track ran ahead of us through the fresh snow, not over a highway, but straddling bushes and boulders, picking its way with double turns, tortuous, torturing turns, which brought us into second at ten miles, then into low gear at five and less, to the hour. The jack rabbits sat and blinked at us as we lurched along. One old buck shook his asinine ears. Another with his right hind toe scratched the left back side of his bonehead, the zany! We were the subject of much speculation, especially within the car. One thing was certain: this sort of going couldn't last long.

But it did. It lasted all day long, and the hour now was nine A.M.

I have never been so mixed up with Nature; never brought by her so low. If ever I am tempted to deride another jack rabbit, with his magnificent legs, let me remember my own limping right one, and the hobbling of our car over that snowy waste. We should have had a stone-boat and a yoke of oxen.

Very shortly we crossed what was evidently the true highway, for yonder stood a California motor-club sign, but all that one could see was a smooth band of white, running off at quite the wrong angle, and without the

mark of a single wheel. The road had been worn below the level of the desert, just deep enough, now that it was full of snow, to make it impassable. Each of us was free to pick his own sweet way, however, and steer by his own true compass, if he had one, and follow the line of the trail when he could.

Daphne had trusted me through many a time of hesitation in the last thirty years. She was for clinging to me here, but not for stopping where we were, even though it now began to snow. I got no support from her. She might as well have been in Hingham and I in Hongkong. Thirty years of doubts dispelled and troths repeated blotted out like a wheel track in a fall of wet, sticky snow! Circumstances, mere circumstances, more often than we like to admit, hold us together. Daphne and I were held in this car, and in this snow, and in this inescapable morass of a meadow. Altogether we were rather closely and securely held, though we were of no particular comfort to each other, for while we have agreed in spite of everything to live together, Daphne has never been partial to the idea of dying with me. She clings singularly, even unpleasantly, to the purpose to live, always looking for life with more eyes than a seed potato.

We had intended to lunch in Flagstaff, and give ourselves an afternoon within the solemn shades and large sweet silences of its lofty groves, comparing things with Santa Barbara and Hingham. We had seen the pines of Flagstaff before, and neither of us could forget.

We came to Flagstaff, but not in time for lunch, nor with an afternoon for worship among the templed pines. By some oversight we found ourselves upon that mountain

meadow without a cracker to eat in the car, nothing but Hingham apples. With a run from Winslow to Flagstaff of only about sixty-five miles, and a climb of not more than two thousand feet, who would think of crackers, though the trail lay, as we knew, over what perhaps would be the roughest lap of the journey? The snow had begun with large, soft flakes as big as cabbage butterflies which lighted upon our windshield, flowing together at first, and melting off, but soon congealing into an opaque crust that stopped the laboring wiper, shutting us into a slowly moving igloo.

I once heard a very young bride say that she would live anywhere with her husband, even in an Eskimo igloo, but the bride was not Daphne, not even at her youngest. She did go out to the Hills of Hingham with me, years before the epoch of the Ford, when we had nothing faster than a bad, black mare and a carryall, but it was to a real house not an igloo. She had come to it now, however.

A queer little gloom shut us in. We could see nothing straight ahead. I tried to open the windshield, but the snow curled in and covered us, and I could make out nothing past the end of the hood. This was Emerson's 'tumultuous privacy of the storm.' I halted to scrape off the ice, only to find the wheel tracks, plain enough to start with, and which we had been following, were now obliterated; that we were without a compass; that there was no sign of direction on the high desert, nothing to guide us through the whirling cloud of snow.

If I could have picked out my own tracks, I should have disregarded Daphne's prejudices against retreating and gone back to Winslow. It was near noon, however, and

comparing speedometer with map, supposing we had gone generally in the right direction, we should be approaching Cañon Diablo.

Judging from the changed quarter of the wind, I took it that we had made the right-angled turn toward the Cañon, as we ought, back near the base of Meteor Mountain. But for all I knew we might have gone around the wrong side of the mountain, or we might be running plumb into it, or we might be climbing over the peak of it, at six miles to the hour, and in this welter of brush and rock and storm.

Craning my head from the window, I felt my way along through the solid but yielding wall of flakes, as through some dank, dim-lighted cave. I switched on the lights, and as I did so heard a muffled horn, and saw, cutting a slow circle out around me, the spectral shadow of a car, then another, and still another, in line, and close together, bent like stooped figures, into the driving, horizontal swirl.

Thick as hung the curtain between us I was sure that last car belonged to the Sourdoughs. Not so bad a driver, after all! I tried to signal, but the horn cracked and went off into a crow about the size of a bantam rooster's. Then through the curtain faded the shadow of the Sourdoughs, to my sorrow — unless it was loneliness they left me feeling, and just a touch of fear.

Anyhow, I swung over and picked up their trail in a hurry, and in spite of Daphne's warnings gave the machine more gas. If Sourdough could drive this wild land to Flagstaff in what was left of the daylight, so could I. Daphne begged me to slow down. She didn't mind staying

out all night with me, she said, but she didn't want to be hurled through the windshield.

On the contrary, I did object to staying out all night with Daphne, and a bushel of apples, in Cañon Diablo, if I could get to Flagstaff. What if this storm turned blizzard, as one had done two weeks before through here, when five persons were frozen to death? Or suppose something happens to the car and we are stalled out here in this swarming snow?

Then without warning something did happen to the car. It is not strange that a moving car should stop moving; but the sudden stop of this car, at this wildish moment, on the brink of this black-browed cañon of the Devil, impressed me as uncanny, by malice prepense; for I felt malevolence in it.

Out of gasoline, I thought; but the tank was half-full. Must have slipped into neutral, I said; but I was still in gear. Has the battery gone bad, I wondered? but it would spin the engine. The timer, the distributor, the generator — and I sank into helpless despair, as the snow packed deeper and darker on the windows, and the grip of the gale tightened, and shapes and voices out of nowhere in the wild silence crowded up about the quailing car.

I had half-expected this to happen. Driving a car all of these years had not made me master, for there is that about any machine which holds me at arms' length, in quite unconquerable ignorance and in unconfessable fear. What an automobile can do is so impressive that what it never has done, but might anywhere decide to do, has always kept me uneasily expectant.

So when Daphne said, 'It's tired. It's just plain tuck-

ered out and discouraged,' her explanation so calmed and fitted in with my fears that I clutched at it. This run *was* worse than the one into Bluewater. No car had ever been called on for such courage as this before. And any other car would have balked long ago. But the thought of the unneighborly three that had just passed by disturbed me. And Sourdough's old tub at that!

'Let it rest a little,' Daphne urged. 'You have doubtless done some fool thing like stepping on the starter, or switching on the battery, but take your feet and hands off of it, altogether. It'll go on again.'

And it *did* go on again! After about five minutes Daphne thought it was rested, so I threw on the switch and away we went! This was more dreadful than the stopping. 'Didn't I tell you?' she said, but said with such shocking indifference and superiority that I was left gasping. And I was still gasping when the car stopped again.

It was now my turn to say something, but I didn't. Daphne didn't say anything either. I don't know why, for it wasn't like her not to. The reason I didn't was because I couldn't. I didn't have anything to say, and my tongue was so dry that I couldn't say it.

Not in a hundred thousand miles of motoring had a car behaved with me like this before. Up to this dreadful moment, until exactly on the brink of this Cañon Diablo, the car in my hand had been invincible. And what punishment it had endured! I am not superstitious, yet there are places, certain inimical atmospheres, which seem to overcharge one's nerves. A clear sky might have stripped the howling waste of its unseen horrors, or at least revealed them, but the gray flattened face against our windows was

without human features, not even eyes, a shapeless, bloodless thing, and blind.

Was something moving there within the curtain of the snow? The quiet, unannounced, mysterious stopping was as if some traffic officer, at this crossing of the flying worlds, had shrilled his stormy whistle and raised his white-gloved, level hand against the creeping car. And I got out to look and listen, if, standing in the tumult unprotected and alone, I might recover my own mastery, might hear, and see, and possibly understand.

Once upon the ground the Christian of me got the better of the superstitious pagan. God is this time in the whirlwind, I said. It is some divine intervention on my behalf. I must needs come to The Better Country. I have a mission to mankind — a great book to write, no doubt. But what a fool I was to leave Hingham! And feeling my way forward cautiously to the brink of the cañon upon which God's unseen hand had arrested me, I came to wheel-tracks — the faint lines of the three cars that had recently passed!

This was better, and, alas! for me, more like God! My sense of direction had not failed me. I was still on the road. The trouble was in the machine. And ignorant as I was of its inward workings, I returned to tinker with them, inexpressibly relieved that it was not God who had stopped going, but the car.

CHAPTER XXII

CAÑON DIABLO!

THE gravity of our situation was eloquent in Daphne's non-resistance and sweet control. She would have battled her way out of the position with head and hand if cars had come within the range of her responsibilities. But having left the whole realm of the automobile to me, she sat with 'countenance demure and modest grace,' as calmly ignorant a creature of cars as ever rode in one. Still, I ran her a close second. We were not unequally yoked together. And what a team for pulling out of such a hole!

I determined to remain as calm as Daphne, though cursing myself inwardly for not having taken a course in the ills and cures of cars. I had been guiding them for years and nothing had happened. But now, in this weird and dreadful moment, when most I needed a strong, sure car, what should happen but that this new, normal, and perfectly healthy machine hitherto, must fall sick, sick unto death, and no doctor in all of the howling wilderness that I could call!

Summoning all my knowledge, I began systematically with the A B C of driving to test for the trouble. Yes, I had gasoline in the tank — six times I had looked to make sure. Yes, I was in 'neutral.' Yes, the brakes were off. Yes, you throw the switch on *so* — and a roar to drown the storm outside tore through the supine machine! Lucky she was in neutral or I should have stripped the gears!

Forward charged the bellowing car like all of the bulls of

Bashan. I grabbed everything at once and nearly stood her on her nose, choked her to a five-mile hobble, and kept going — for a quarter of a mile, perhaps, down with a cant into a deep wash, the Cañon Diablo, if it were that place, and, coming up against an opposite wall, again stood still.

The same sinking spell! Playing 'possum? Possessed of devils? Or was the thing just plain scared, as I was? How like a white-eyed mule! But you can argue with a mule, if you know the language of the beasts and had learned their way, as I had when a boy. Instinctively I fell back upon my knowledge of mules.

The thought of the mule diverted me — first aid to any species of balky mind. Getting out to examine the slope, I humored the asinine turn of my thoughts, and, like Daphne, found ample excuse for the car's lying down on this particular job. The grade only *looked* up-and-down, probably, but there certainly was no question of its out-pitching the steepest roof by several degrees.

I felt as weak in the knees as my hinny of a car. Could this be the temporary trail, I wondered? Or any trail? No doubt of that, but the machine that blazed this section in front of me had had its courage with it!

Would that I had my courage with me! Sheer physical misery, dismay at the machine, and actual dread of the situation, combined against me. This was the Devil's cañon truly! The Devil's car — the Devil's driver — the Devil's doing, all of it! Everything here was the Devil's — except Daphne. The Devil has his match in Daphne.

Coming back to the car, I asked Daphne to get out and have a look at what we were up against.

'Why should I see it?' she asked.

'You ought to know what you're doing,' I told her.

'But I'm not doing anything. I'm just sitting here.'

'Daphne,' I said, 'this is serious. You should go into this thing with your eyes open.'

'I did go into it thirty years ago with my eyes open,' she answered calmly, 'and I'm not shutting them now. Who's driving this car?'

'Really, I don't know.'

'Well, who *thinks* he is?'

'That's harder than the other question.'

'You're simply not to be reasoned with. And no man ever is. Who brought me into this hole?'

'I did.'

'Then you get me out. That's your part, not mine. If you can't go on, you can go back to Hingham. That's not my responsibility.'

'What is your responsibility, Daphne?'

'You are,' she answered patiently, 'and Heaven knows I have my hands full!'

'But aren't you my responsibility, Daphne? And doesn't high Heaven witness that my hands are full?'

'Not at all, my dear. I'm responsible for both of us, and always have been. You have nothing but the car and this hill, which you want me to walk up. But I won't. I won't even look at it. It's not my hill to climb; it's yours. I've done my whole duty by you when I make you take me up. If you could only see how much harder my part is than yours!'

'Don't blame me, Daphne, if you get killed.'

'But I shall blame you if I get killed. And I shall blame you a great deal more if I get any hurt. You have to climb

this hill. I have to sit here with all my might to see that you climb it wisely and well, which is my idea of marriage.'

'Well, this isn't getting us anywhere,' I said, for you can't reason with a woman.

'I'm not so sure,' was Daphne's sweet rejoinder. 'I think it's getting us to the top of this hill. Start up and see. All this car needs is gasoline.'

Why, certainly! And how stupid of me not to have thought it out before! There must be a stoppage somewhere in the fuel flow. What else could these fainting spells mean? And the thought drove every devil from the cañon, though it didn't clear the air of snow. Nor did it show me what I was to do next. Nor do I yet know, under the circumstances, what I could have done next. I'm going to be honest with my driving for once, and confess that it wasn't skill of mine which delivered us from that cañon.

I cleared the windshield once more, took another look at the grade, and, though I hate to own up to it, for story heroes never do it, committed my case to the hands of Chance. And Chance was with me. A serener, more confident engine never faced a climb. As if this were exactly what I had expected, and the result of my own mechanical insight and excellent management, I went through the careless movements of the sure driver for the sake of inspiring Daphne, and, pulling out the choke, crashed through at the hill with all the horse power I had.

And up we went! Up, up, more slowly to the middle; hung spinning there in a pasty spot; and dying, surely dying, when *pop*! Something exploded forward, a strange odor of saltpeter filled the car, then a tremor shook her,

when suddenly the chained and clogged wheels seemed to burst from under the back mud-guards, and we shot up over the rim as if all the devils of the cañon were prodding us from behind.

'Lend me your hanky, will you, Daphne?' I asked, expecting the car to stop.

'What for? I don't make a habit of lending or borrowing hankies,' she replied.

'Then kindly wipe the sweat off of these spectacles for me,' pulling the mussy things from my nose while staring ahead through the icy windshield for a glimpse of the trail.

'Sweat?' she exclaimed. 'Why, I'm nearly frozen. What are you doing?' as I throttled down and brought the car to a halt.

'I'm going to kiss you right here.'

'What for?'

'For your nerve!' I cried.

'Not till we get to Flagstaff,' she said decisively, reaching with her little foot for the accelerator.

But I did it — right there, too. That's one thing that it isn't hard to do to Daphne.

'We'll never get to Flagstaff if you fool along like this,' she protested. 'And you have repeatedly told me that at last we had a fool-proof car!'

'So we have, Daphne,' I replied humbly, the dear girl not knowing how humbly.

'Well, it doesn't seem so to me,' pulling the robe more snugly about her cold knees.

What else could it be? For it was still going, and it continued to go, and not again for the rest of the journey, nor

on the long road back, did its eager spirit falter or its stout heart skip in its steady beating, or even flutter a single valve.

On we moved toward Flagstaff, and neither of us shall ever forget the wonder of those dusky, snowy miles through Cañon Padre, and Young's Cañon, as like a phantom car we drifted with the wind across the flattened sage and into a hilly stretch of cedars, out of a tossing ocean into a calm and sheltered cove.

I can still hear the sweet, low welcome of that cedared slope. How vainly the foiled winds screamed above the high ridge! And the comforting, murmuring trees, how they embraced and mothered us! Then in the lull of the all-day battle we found ourselves upon a real road, winding now from among the cedars into a forest of straight, tall pines, yellow and sugar pines, the first of these noble tribes we had encountered. Here was one with a blur of white upon its bole — some forest ranger's notice, or else a story of how old, how high the towering creature was, how many cords of wood, how many square feet of lumber, how many houses were in his mighty frame. Or it might be a warning of fire, for him who runs or camps to read — how a careless match, or cigarette, dropped on the needles underfoot would touch the tinder into flame and sweep the mountains, reducing to shapeless cinders in a day this living temple which had been building through the centuries.

We did not stop to read. We merely felt the human touch upon the trees and knew that we were blessed. And how the sound of the storm receded here, how distant and sweet it seemed! Now and then the big bass notes would

break from around the bottoms of the boles, and, rolling down the pillared aisles, make the very temple floor to tremble, so vast was the volume of the organ, so stately was the march of the music, the tread of its feet through the columned spaces so solemnly grand.

Then through the forest a glimmer of light! Here a fork in the road, a fence among the trees, an advertising sign (the only one I was ever glad to see), more lights — and Flagstaff — a reality, which all day long had been worse than a nightmare!

We swung in to a filling station on the outer edge of the town, where another car was tanking up. It had once been a Ford, but it was now a traveling maternity, bulging with children from the inside; the outside — that is, the roof, running-boards, bumpers, mud-guards, and hood — were absolutely cluttered with domestic kit, while the body, or such portions of it that showed, bore the number-plates of all the United States, including Rhode Island and Canada.

I thought I had had my share of trouble. I am sure I counted eight faces through the broken celluloid windows and between the curtains, and there was one inside that I did not see, who had been born on the road since the car started two years before on its family way.

'Look!' cried Daphne as the tousled heads of the cherubim stuck through the curtains like the heads of chickens through the slats of a crate, 'did you ever see such rosy cheeks?'

I never did. Nor so many out of one Ford. Nor so many number-plates, for there were fifty of them, if there was one, blocking out a cubist distortion with perfect mis-

arrangement, though the picture was not without a certain futurist touch in the faces of the children, which the most rabid anti-post-impressionist must instantly have yielded to along with Daphne.

This was not the worst case of *touring forditis* we were to see, but as a chronic case it shall always stand to us for the classic of the type. And as the spider-legged head of this peripatetic household grabbed the back of the seat, swung one foot up under the rooftree, and, executing a tendril-like movement with the off leg, disposed of himself like a human python about the post of his steering wheel, I asked him where he was going, and to my horror heard him say to Williams!

Williams? Was the fellow mad? With all of those innocent children! And as the outfit headed off *out* of Flagstaff I turned to the gasoline man to stop it.

'He's crazy!' I cried.

'I think so,' said the gasoline man, as the tail-light winked and went out in the dark of the cañon. ''Pears he wanted to get out of here. This might be his last chance for the Lord knows when if it continues to snow. Any hurry yourself, stranger?'

I looked at Daphne. She looked at me. Hurry? Didn't we have to meet that seven-forty train in Los Angeles the morning of the twenty-third? Hurry? Why, we hadn't an hour of running time to spare! I turned and looked at the gasoline man for one speechless moment, mercifully incapable of complete realization, being insensible now to degrees of pain.

'Yes,' I muttered thickly, 'I have an important engagement three days from now in Los Angeles.'

'Now, stranger,' the man said kindly, 'we ain't inhospitable here in Flagstaff. We'd like to have you park your bus and stay. But if you are going to get as far as Williams this week, you'll have to travel right along after that little old bug of a Ford.'

'How far is it to Williams?' I asked, though I knew exactly.

'Thirty-three miles, and a good road, stranger, if you stay on it. But it's bad in the dark and the snow if you drop off down the cañon walls.'

I got back into my ossified position under the steering wheel. I stiffened again to the mechanics of driving, the motions no longer requiring my paralyzed brain. We were deep in the dark of the cañon and the madness of the snow. The headlights coated over and I got out to clear them off. The left chain worked loose and grabbed the tip of the mud-guard. I got out and wallowed in a hopeless drift to take up a link in the frozen chain. From away up in the sky two dim lights appeared and disappeared. Then suddenly they were bearing down upon me, but touching a curve were blotted out; touching another curve, they threw a wide beam out over an abysmal gulch, and, traversing half a circle in that dreadful arc, flashed up against the wall that I was hugging, and passed.

The muffled whirr of the chains was hardly gone when my lights glimmered into a black pit ahead of me, the road seemed to drop from under the machine, and I was slowing up at the bottom of a sharp descent on the wall, where four fresh wheel-tracks told of a car just gone over into the ravine.

Coming to a stop, I got out. There it lay below me, its

wheels in the air, still turning to my distorted imagination, so recently had the accident occurred. I was sick at what I might discover, when fresh human foot prints showed me that I could go on.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE GRAND CAÑON OR THE BOYS?

The driver of the overturned car had been pulled out through his windshield and carried just ahead of us into Williams, not fatally hurt, as we were told the next morning. It comforted me profoundly to know that he would live, that the human frame could be salvaged from such a situation, out of such a wreck. But the thought of him, of the whole day in and out of Flagstaff, of which he was the climax, left me uncertain of motoring as a means of discovering The Better Country.

If Daphne suffered from such a mind there was no manifestation of it in the morning. She came down as if it were May Day instead of the twentieth of December. Every bone in my body hurt at sight of her, though I had sloughed off the body of yesterday in my sleep, except for the bones. Daphne was renewed like the eagle — new bones, new blood, new mind to meet the new day, and especially to meet the new road. A new road to her is more than a new day, I think.

As for me, I was having moments of longing for the old roads back home. Not so Daphne, not one such moment! New roads for her all of the time! She traveled miles ahead of the car, her strip-map a kind of foreclosed mortgage on the Promised Land. And this was the domestic creature who had gone over the road with her children to school! And with me to Boston, as if there were no other roads in

the world! Does any man ever know the real wife of his bosom, I wonder?

Perhaps not, being content if only she looks like Daphne, and is there when he gets home at night. But I was bound to keep up with Daphne if I could, having come pretty far with her to stop now. Besides, nothing could have persuaded me to turn back through that cañon for Flagstaff.

We had struck some rather rough places on the road these thirty years, though nothing worse than from Holbrook to Williams, and here was Daphne looking like Aurora, though through the Devil's Cañon only yesterday, and through it with me! Daphne is no longer young, to be sure — in her middle fifties, as I have said before. But every other woman is in her middle fifties, or has been, or is speedily coming that way. There is nothing the matter with the middle fifties, unless you dress them up like the thirties, or dread them like the sixties.

We saw little of Williams, arriving in the dark and leaving in the dark, which is quite the way with travelers through Williams and the World.

'It's a pity,' Daphne was saying, as we drew out of town, 'not to run up to the Grand Cañon.'

'The Cañon is sixty miles from here, and the road is blocked with snow, Daphne. We should have to go by train.'

'Is there time do you think?' she asked.

'Not if we meet the boys.'

'Whose fault is it,' she moaned, 'that we always so mismanage?'

'I don't understand you, Daphne. At least I don't see that I had anything to do with the number of miles be-

tween here and the Grand Cañon, or with the amount of snow in the roads, or with the day of the month this is, or with this particular time of this particular day. Those things are in other hands than mine. But if you are referring to the children, if you mean having children is mismanagement, why, I confess to being a bit old-fashioned, and to being partly at fault. But really, Daphne, you are partly . . .'

But she stuffed her fingers in her ears, and thus held up a modern and fruitful discussion which society needs the sensible and the experienced to settle for it.

Really it was a pity, having motored three thousand miles from Hingham to within sixty miles of the Grand Cañon, that we must hurry on to Los Angeles in order to meet a train. And the greater pity is that meeting it we should spoil an exciting day for the boys in Los Angeles. Life had been so punctual with those two boys! What punctual parents they had inherited! Here we were, risking life and limb and missing the Grand Cañon of the Colorado, the most stupendous thing in the world, for the sake of pouncing like a pair of sheriffs upon two unoffending, liberty-loving boys!

I had brought the car to a stop.

'Well,' said I, 'is it the Grand Cañon or the boys?'

'Don't pose,' she charged me. 'What would they do getting into Los Angeles alone?'

'Just what they did last year when they got in alone — have a gorgeous time. Don't you remember their letters?'

'Do you mean,' she exclaimed, looking at me with horror, 'that you had rather visit the Grand Cañon than meet your boys? Please start ahead for Los Angeles. We

simply can't be late! And if you will let me run the car for the rest of the way, we *won't* be late.'

'I'm certain of it, Daphne. You have brought us from Hingham into Williams right on time. I'll trust you the remainder of the way, even if I do hold the wheel. Here's for Pershing Square by five P.M. day after to-morrow!'

'I count on arriving at four-thirty,' she remarked, consulting her schedule. 'Let's stick to our original plans.'

A light, scattering snow was still drifting over the desert. The muffled flap of the chains in the unbroken road had the thick sound of egg-beaters in a bowl of stiffened whites. We were the first afield. Only those who have seen with their own eyes this fiery land beneath a coverlid of snow can imagine the wonder, as the sky cleared, that came upon us. Snow on the desert is divine.

Yet I put up a heartfelt prayer for sand, red-hot sand, as a change; and my prayer was answered the next day. Any one can pray for sand within a day's run of California and expect a speedy answer to his prayer. But it is not a wise kind of prayer, not if it is for red-hot Mohave sand, when you are so near to Needles, California. After this when the road is snow I will take the snow; when it is mud I will take the mud; when it is sand I will take the sand. But I will never again pray for any extra hot sand.

Daphne declares that the run from Williams that day to the Gold Road Grade and down into Oatman surpassed for variety of experience and strangeness of landscape any other day of the journey. I think it did. We were deep now in the arid Southwest, shifting constantly from mesa to cañon, through open plains, past wind-eroded, painted

walls, into dry rocky washes, across arroyo after arroyo, coming to isolated corrals and adobe houses, an Indian school, flocks of goats, mines, and everywhere the weird furniture of the desert, prickly-pear, century plant, the hoary cholla, greasewood, and the dusty sage.

At one turn we dipped over a sharp ridge and dropped down into a narrow ravine where shrubby yellow flowers were in bloom, and two tall cottonwoods in golden leaf, like Hingham hickories in October, aspens quivering in a little stand, and willows on a margin of the gully in full leaf. The effect upon us, suddenly out of the days of snow and forward into the snow again, was so utterly unreal that I asked Daphne if we were dreaming it.

Our trail followed very closely the tracks of the Santa Fe for the greater part of the hundred and thirty-five miles to Kingman. At Peach Springs we came upon a small fruit orchard, the first human touch of that kind, I think, since away back at Dodge City. Twisting down through Truxton Cañon we jogged into Hackberry for a cup of coffee and a piece of pie. It would have been well for me had I taken a second piece of pie, this time.

For here we ran into black earth across a rather open country, and instantly the car went panicky, every moving part of it on the bevel and into the oblique, sliding and slithering Iowa fashion, as if struck with the blind-staggers. For two mortal hours I struggled toward the mountains into which the road disappeared, so completely engaged that it was Daphne, of a sudden, who called my attention to the absence of snow.

We were sixteen miles out of Hackberry. The snow was gone! I halted the panting, gyrating machine and looked

at the landscape. Daphne looked at me. For a whole minute neither of us spoke.

'Do you suppose . . .'

'Yes, I do.'

'Really?'

'Really, I do — the end, the very end of the snow!'

'Daphne!'

'And the beginning of The Better Country at last!' she cried.

'Well, if you love me, Daphne, do get up on your knees and rub my nigh shoulder!'

'You mean the one on my side?'

'Yes, if it's not a wing or a fin or something. Heavens, how it hurts! I wish we could walk the rest of the way.'

'Nonsense! Think of the easy time we've had compared with those who cross the desert in the summer.'

'Do you think I would leave Hingham in the summer, Daphne?'

'I didn't say that. I said compare our perfectly delightful time with what we might have had in the frightful heat and sand of the summer.'

'But we couldn't have it in the summer. You can't think of me out of Hingham in the summer. And really, Daphne, I can hardly think of myself out here another winter. If ever we get back to Hingham again . . .'

'There,' she said, giving my burning shoulder an excruciating osteopathic pull, 'you're feeling better already. Aren't the mountains wonderful yonder? Isn't it unbelievable that we're done with the snow! We're losing a lot of time, though.'

We were going again. The road was a black ridge

thrown up with scrapers, without ballast or bottom, the very worst road for a conscious transition from winter into perpetual spring.

'The seasons do have their compensations, don't they?' she went on, as if sorry to be done with the snow.

'Do you reckon snow among them, Daphne? And shoveling?'

'Why, that's what you brought the shovel for. Think of carrying that cumbersome thing for thousands of miles in a fine car without the satisfaction of needing and using it! And especially when I advised you not to bring it! The snow justified you. Could there be too much justifying snow?'

'Not in Hingham, Daphne. I think we'll stay there next winter and justify all of our other shovels. But on the road — if carrying shovels would discourage the beautiful snow, I would load the car with them.'

'Listen,' she said. 'We're in the Mohave to-morrow, and long before we come to Barstow you'll be dying to shovel snow.'

We were nearly to the mountains when the car lost control of its hind quarters, slumped over the crown of the road and headed for the ditch. Daphne clutched my arm, I clapped on the brake, and with everything as it shouldn't be, we came to a trembling pause, the front wheels hard cut in the grass on the edge of the pit.

'Thank Heaven!' Daphne groaned. 'Thank Heaven, we're not the other end in! Because you are very good — don't be offended — I don't mean it ill — but really you are very good at backing out!'

'We're a wonderful team, Daphne. I'm good at backing

out. You're simply great at going ahead. Which means we pull together about like most married couples.'

'There!' she exclaimed as we came back to the crown of the road with a sickening swirl. 'But you are a dreadful driver!'

CHAPTER XXIV

THE GOLD ROAD GRADE

I MAY be a dreadful driver. That depends. I deserve, and I do not escape, the discredit for the mishaps the car gets into; but I tell Daphne she ought to give me credit for all of the mishaps that I keep the car from getting into. That seems to me the simplest of logic, yet it isn't convincing to Daphne. I never went to sleep over the wheel but once, and then I didn't cut Daphne up so as to disfigure her, much. She remembers that, but not the times when I haven't gone to sleep. She nods off a dozen times a day over her maps, and right in the midst of the dreadfulest of scenery, where I could as readily sleep in an electric chair. I tell her that anybody who can doze in a moving motor car, as in a cradle at her mother's toe, has no very dreadful driver.

Our road now steadily improved, and though the region here had been having a two-days' rain, I took off the tire chains on coming into Kingman. It was as if I had struck them from my own ankles, so much was I a part of the machine. No more snow! No more mud! No more drag of winter! Years of time and tons of clay seemed to fall at that prospect from my spirit.

We hurried through the town, a wide gravelly road running before us, and about three miles out found ourselves facing a spectacular sunset upon the wall of the Black Mountains some twenty miles away. Did we descend toward those delectable mountains, or was the

effect of flying due to some trick of the light upon the summits, and the deep, purple shadows at the edge of the plain below? Or was it chains — freedom at last from those galling chains? For down we seemed to fly, then up on the wings of the light, out of our old world to the gates of one that was new. We should cross that range of mountains before dark, drop down the winding grade into Oatman, shoot through the few remaining miles to the great Colorado, and sleep the night at Needles on the California side!

I can scarcely stick to prose down those twenty flying miles to the mountains, though Daphne says I'm pure, unmeasured prose. The worst thing about Daphne is her hopeless rightness. In spite of her religious purpose to keep me to the facts, I do borrow a poet's license now and then, and, hitching Pegasus to my plough, turn a little short on the endless furrow of prose. If ever a steed had wings it was this car on the free-from-winter swoop to the mountains out of Kingman.

How soon we reached the foothills and were twisting between the knees of the range, then along the flanks, looking down into deep, far valleys where the hoary chollas seemed to cover the walls with soft gray bloom! But the night came rapidly on, and the higher we climbed the slipperier grew the winding grade. At places the car stood almost still on spinning wheels, the curves too close and the pitch too steep to allow me a safe chance to stop and adjust the chains.

The old incubus of the winter was still dragging at our wheels. We had not escaped. Perhaps we never should escape. But I could find more matter-of-fact and safer

roads than these in Hingham. Does it count much after all in the course of the year whether you suffer in Massachusetts or in California: the nine months of temperate climate there, or the twelve months of intemperate climate here? Woodchucks and cutworms eat us in one place; scorpions and rattlesnakes are liable to sting and bite us in the other.

When we finally crept into the cut at the top of the pass, it was dark night, and what with the dark and the yellow mud I was something fearful as I got back into the car from putting on the chains. And the worst of that day was yet to come.

I hate to descend. The outer edge of the road was on Daphne's side of the car again, but I think it seemed all the more awful for that. And the way the headlights touched up the brinks of the curves, and wandered off across black, bottomless spaces that fenced the road! Then the sickening effect of the brakes! And the pricking lights of the camp at the gold mine away in the blackness below us, like fires through the roof of Hell!

We hit bottom at Oatman, and stayed there. No one in the last throes of lock-jaw could have been more nearly rigid than I as the car nosed up to a friendly lamp-post in the main street of Oatman. Daphne got out and shook her skirts.

Oatman is not a travelers' town, having been developed wholly by gold miners for gold miners; but if you like gold miners, as Daphne and I do, then you will like Oatman. It is a jumbled little burg, on more street levels, I think, than any other American town I ever visited, and if it lacks in finish and refinement, the landlady at the eating-

house more than makes amends by her hospitality — if she sets out for you such another New England boiled dinner as she gave to us.

The boarders had eaten when we arrived. So had the help. But the table stood there, and back from the kitchen trooped the beef, not a whole one on the hoof, not the remains of one, but the beginnings of one; back came the vegetables, pecks of them: carrots, beets, potatoes, turnips, string beans, and a big, brainy head of cabbage, sweating seasoned, oily, briskety beads of pure gustatory pleasure.

Daphne seized the carving-knife and laid the glistening head in two mighty halves, and helped herself to a whole half. I was thunderstruck. Did she realize what she was doing? Evidently she did. And I wasted no time doing the same thing to the other half. If anybody noticed our behavior, it was only to bring on another juicy head.

There was too much going on in Oatman for anybody to give us any particular notice, for this was pay-day up at the gold mine; and there were doings in Oatman to match the doings in the quaint old days of Leadville and Tombstone when every day was pay-day.

If I say that Oatman was wide open, I must explain that it was so wide open that no one was squeezed or pinched or hustled. A sober New England village could hardly have looked more orderly or more Yankee than Oatman. We were visitors, not uplifters, weary, muddy, hungry visitors, and Oatman gave us a bath and a bed and the best boiled dinner I ever tasted. I think very highly of Oatman, but as I had no stock in the gold mine, but great stock in Prohibition, I could see that Oatman was not The Better Country I was seeking.

Cross-legged on the floor at the end of the long mess-room, while we were eating, sat two young miners gambling with what was left of their week's wages. One was so drunk that he couldn't count, depending entirely upon his sober opponent to make change and keep tally. And the sober one was patient and scrupulous. He would set the tipsy one up when he tumbled over. I saw him take up a 'ten-spot' that had been slapped down to cover his own one dollar stake, and, carefully counting out ten one-dollar bills of his own, hand them back to his rival who stuffed them all under his leg. This made it necessary to roll him over and extract one before the dice could be rattled again.

'He won't have a cent left when he quits,' said the motherly mistress of the mess-house. 'Oh, yes, they have paid me for their board in advance. They're a fair and honorable lot. Of course I hate to have them do it, and I wish they couldn't get the drink. But it's better to have them play here where I can keep a friendly eye upon them than in some dark hole in the town.'

'How would you like to be a miner?' asked Daphne as we walked back up the street to our room.

'How would you like to be mess-mother to that bunch of miners?' I asked in turn.

'Oh, there are compensations for such a mother,' she replied, thoughtfully.

'So there are for such a miner, Daphne.' And Daphne shot a keen glance at me, as if she might pick out which of the two miners I meant, or if I meant both of those on the carpetless floor.

That night it did not snow.

If I had gone off without Daphne the next morning,

neither of us would have discovered it for a time, so close were we now to that Better Country, to that larger life, that greater work in Santa Barbara!

While Daphne was dressing, I took out Astrid's letter and read it aloud once more.

'"Dear Professor" — I wish she hadn't written "Professor," Daphne. It so binds me to the past.'

'But you don't expect to escape your past, do you? To be born again in Santa Barbara?'

'Partly.'

'What do you mean by *partly* born again?'

'I'm not very clear in my mind on this whole project of ours. But *do* you think, Daphne, that I can write a truly great book in Santa Barbara?'

'Well,' she said thoughtfully, 'you never did in Hingham.'

Folding dear Astrid's letter, I put it back in my pocket and went out for the car, half-wishing that I were a gold miner way up on the mountain yonder, even if I did have to come down to this Oatman town.

The rain of the past few days had been general over Arizona, and I wonder if I shall ever see anything so strangely tender as the stretch of desert from Oatman to the Colorado River.

Overnight, it seemed, under the scanty shade of every clump of greasewood and rabbit-brush had spread a circle of softest green. A vivid green had flushed the smoky mesquite, had touched the willows and the palo verde trees, and even turned to tender leaves along the thorny ribs of the terrible ocotillo. But Daphne said that this was verdant imagination on the ocotillo, not real leaves. And

why not some imagination when the miracle of life is wrought before your eyes, by no natural process of growth, but as by the waving of some magic wand? It was a veritable resurrection out of the cerements of the dusty desert tomb.

The road ran due south through the Black Mesa, the Hualapai Mountains close on our left, the jagged points of The Needles farther off in front, like blasted peaks of mountains in the moon. Nothing alive crossed our trail except some small desert sparrows and a strange flycatcher and the inevitable jack rabbit. Animal life had not felt the touch of the wakening rain.

Yet it must awake, and all the desert be stirring by nightfall, so electric with life seemed the rainy air. Daphne kept trying to fill her lungs with it, as if she might get enough in a single breath to satisfy the craving of her winter blood. Impossible! The stuff didn't seem to fill the lungs, but only expanded them, inflated them, till one's very ribs might loosen and one's heart pull its picket-pin and gallop off.

The ozone went to Daphne's head. She was gazing off at the great earth rift in whose bottom flowed the sullen, yellow Colorado, and whose opposite wall was California. The color in her face, the dangerous light in her eyes, the heaving of her bosom, the only language she could command, and this she could not command. I was affected, too, but in my bones, as if they were hollow, like birds' bones, and I were lighter than the air.

Was this the effect of rain upon the desert? Or the sight of California and the nearness of the children? Or was it the actual approach of life's great promise long deferred?

It was all of these, and other things, not seen but felt, coincident with the enchanted place and hour.

We passed a prospector's 'duck,' the little cairn of stones marking the corner of a claim, unproved like the most of life's claims, but yet the sign that some one before us, crossing the desert, had dared to stop and dream.

Then we were winding with the Colorado and looking deep down upon its turbid tide, a sullen, alien, unapproachable current of silt, a last amorphous drudge left over from the subdividing days to level and grade this still unfinished section of the globe. Then, as the sun rose higher, the tender beauty spread into tremendous grandeur, the grandeur into Titanic and terrible shapes and powers, from which every human sense and instinct shrank affrighted. At least it was so with me.

Halting on the narrow bridge, we filled our beings with the deeps below and above us, and Daphne said, as she clutched the rail:

'There is nothing in the Blue Hills of Milton, or the church spires of Weymouth, or the soil in our Hingham garden to prepare us for this. You would be terribly homesick here.' Then, swinging slowly around the whole vast, terrific horizon, she added pensively, 'But I shall always be homesick away from here. How I wish . . .'

'Wish what, Daphne?' I asked, slipping my arm around her.

'What's the use of wishing that we could start again, this time from the banks of the Colorado, as thirty years ago we started from the banks of the Kennebec?'

A moment longer we hung high in the air between all that we had had of a past and whatever might still be in

store for us of the future. There, within a stone's throw lay possibly Our Better Country. But we were loath to pass over. The great river, so far below us, held us chained to the bridge.

'How long it has been flowing!' she murmured. 'As long as Time — which bears all its sons away.'

We got back into the machine and entered California.

'Are you sure this is California?' she asked me, doubt and disappointment in her voice.

'I thought it was, Daphne,' I replied, trying to conceal my own deep depression.

'What have we ever seen anywhere,' she moaned, 'so barren and unromantic?'

CHAPTER XXV

THE SANDS OF THE MOHAVE

However, I pointed out to Daphne that this dirt road climbing up from the muddy Colorado was in fair condition, and that you can get on faster by a fair, if unromantic, road than by a poor one, no matter how pretty. But the less said about roads of any sort in this story the better. Daphne and I have discussed that item of roads, especially whether on a motor road the shortest distance between two points is necessarily the straightest line; and whether, on the same kind of road, fifty-two hundred and eighty feet are always and actually a motor mile. Married people will have their little differences, and, I suppose, are in duty bound to maintain their minor points of view. I simply can't convince Daphne that a motor car is not part flying machine.

Nor have I ever been able to induce her to look under the hood of a car and see that its parts are not spirit. Should I lay a naked crank-shaft upon her lap, and try to explain to her the mechanics of its profoundly broken form, she would marvel only that it hurt her knees. But if she understood more, she might believe less, and so be spoiled as a passenger. If Daphne knew as much as I know about motors, we might never have started for The Better Country. And if she knew exactly how much it is that I know about motors, she would go on from Needles by the Santa Fe train.

Daphne suspects, of course, as every woman does, and

frankly calls me a dreadful driver, though never declining to ride with me, not even on a trip like this to The Better Country. She has rather persistently refused to know the whole disquieting truth about me, taking her vows for better or for worse, like every woman, with both eyes wide open for the better and rather tight shut, sometimes, on the worse. I hate to think, though, how much she knows.

The day was still young as we jogged into and through Needles, where we stopped only long enough to stare at the trees and the buildings and the people, and to pinch ourselves into realizing without a doubt that the scene was real, that we were real, and had not gone down a rabbit-hole with Alice since crossing the Colorado, or otherwise lost track of time and place and our identity.

We were yet blinded, I suppose, by the snow. To drive out of winter into summer is not our way in Hingham, there being an interminable journey through an intermediate, inchoate season known as spring. To drive, I say, across two thousand miles of snow straight into a city of leafy palms and lacy pepper trees, with dooryards banked in blazing red geraniums, and scented with purple heliotrope so big that birds could build in the branches, and bejeweled with pendant fuchsia blossoms — such unreal blossoms! I say that here is a shift of scene to make one rub one's eyes and wonder if one is still in one's senses, and in one's native United States.

As every traveler to The Better Country knows, this was exactly as California should be; exactly as we had expected it to be; only it was too sudden. Our tires were shod with winter chains yesterday, and our minds were still sharp-shod and calked against the cold — with palm

trees bending over us, while before us stretched the dry, hot sands of the Mohave Desert!

They were very dry, very hot, very stretched-out sands — clear 'to Victorville where the macadam begins.' The car had four good tires when it started into those sands, and that lava rock, and the vulcanizing sunshine, but before the macadam began at Victorville the rubber-eating Gods of the Mohave had picked the bones of three of the tires and had the fourth one singed and on to stew.

And they had us on to roast. The car was an oven. I thought I should smother with the windows shut. Daphne said she should suffocate with the windows open. So I opened mine, and she shut hers, and the only reason we didn't both stifle was because neither of us would allow himself to choke except in his own determined way.

I tell Daphne that such decided preferences are always going to make it hard for us to die. But she says dying will be easy enough. It is living with such set and foolish prejudices that she finds so hard. Daphne never seems to realize that life has similar problems for me, too, at times.

The size of San Bernardino County and the condition of its road were the greatest problems of their sort that I had ever encountered. Perhaps there is a larger county in the United States, and a worse road, though neither proposition is conceivable.

The State, or, possibly and more properly, the United States, had started work upon this county road, and for more than a score of miles had mightily increased its rolling stones and shifting sands, but had done nothing, I believe, to augment the heat. I got out to do a little

shoveling, and accidentally laid my bare hand on a bumper. I won't say that the hand was blistered, but I could have fried ham on any exposed portion of that machine, I am sure. I asked Daphne at what degree spontaneous combustion occurred in normal climates; because our car had a laminated wooden sill, and it looked to me as if we might at any moment go up in smoke.

Remembering the gusto with which I had shoveled off the skyline back in Kansas, I stepped around here like a hen on a hot sidewalk, and after a few feeble dabs at the sand got back into the car with the feeling that my shoveling days were over. Perhaps from this time on I could hold the end of a garden hose from a rustic chair, and never feel my sciatic leg again. But, dear Lord, I had rather lose both of my legs, and stub about my garden on wooden ones, so only I'm allowed to *dig* with my shovel and my hoe!

Daphne was no comfort to me. She was too hot. And in no direction was there the shadow of a great rock to hide under. I studied the strip-map for possible shade. The gasoline tanks, the eating and lodging places, were indicated; but nothing with shade to sell. Looking along the line of road from Needles I saw Hartoum, the Dead Mountains, Ibis, Piute, Arimo, Siam, Cadiz, Saltus, Bagdad, Siberia, Klondike, Ash Hill, Argos, Lavic, Pisgah, Hector, Troy, and the like, but nothing that looked shady or reminded me of home.

'We've made a mistake, Daphne,' I said, 'in coming out here.'

'But this is no place to be sorry about it. Drive on! But do-don't drive fast.'

'Has this heat gone to your head, dear? I don't understand.'

'I suppose not. But do, please, drive ON, and don't hit the holes and the rocks and the sand.'

'You're leaving me absolutely nothing, Daphne, to drive on. This road is composed of just three things: holes and rocks and sand in about equal proportions. I've got to hit all three of them about all of the time if we are to reach Los Angeles by three-thirty P.M. to-morrow.' And I started on, very much depressed by the weather, and the looks of the country, and the thought of how many people had gone to California to die.

That night we spent in Barstow, which adds nothing to the story, while somehow leaving us forever the poorer by at least a night. It was not cash we lost in Barstow, nor sleep, after a kind, but possibly our right to dream. There was nothing romantic about the town. It had irrigation. But running water is not living water unless it seeps about the roots, and causes to bloom and burgeon that rare Western plant, the imagination. Barstow had water for radiator and bath, but not a drop for beauty. And what else were we seeking in our air-cooled car?

Here at Barstow we met one of our Dodge City pilgrims — the auctioneer with the wife and the sick son in California, whose car, as we came up to the curb that night in Kansas, bore the legend, 'California for Christmas.' He was held up here by a broken axle. The Knight and his son, he told us, had left Needles with the Sourdoughs, as we were leaving Oatman, and by this time must be at their journey's end in Los Angeles. Walla Walla was the destination of the Sourdoughs, and it comforted me not a

little in Barstow to think that Daphne was not Mrs. Sourdough, and that we were going only to Santa Barbara, possibly.

Along toward morning, about the hour when it is darkest, I heard Daphne asking, 'What time is it? I'm sure we ought to be on the road.'

I didn't agree with her, not at that hour; and never do on the question of when to begin to *use* daylight as against the saving of it. Time as a human affair is troublesome enough when it is Standard Time. Daylight Saving Time only adds to the lying, and covers us the deeper with confusion.

Daphne is wrong in thinking she can save time. She is often wrong. Yet, as now, she usually manages to err on the convincing side of the argument. So I got up, as I usually do, and took to the road. And when you are traveling by road so considerable a distance, to meet so early a train, it is reasonable to be on the road rather early.

From Needles on to Barstow a line of motor wreckage had strewn our shore. Dismembered parts of automobiles made the prospect grewsome. Blistered, blown-out, disemboweled tires told an awful story of hara-kiri — driven to it by the size of San Bernardino County and the eviscerating lava rock in the road. Unhallowed as junk, protruding from the drifting sand, or prone where they had fallen, lay the bones of every known species of car, waiting for the great honk of the Judgment Day, when, with new bodies and perpetual wheels, they shall once more know the road — across the desert of San Bernardino County, down the streets of Los Angeles County, among the

gardens of Santa Barbara County, on, and on, and forever on to The Better Country.

Or was this the breath of my own desire which I was breathing upon these many and dry bones? Was I really glad, as I thought last night, that my road was to stop at Santa Barbara, when it could go on to Walla Walla? This was the last full day's run; but see what might yet be in store for the Sourdoughs!

It had looked like a long run from Hingham, but it looked like a very short run now. And I began to wonder about the road to Walla Walla. One hates the ends of things. I had become very much addicted to wheels. Ploughing the snow and sand had been hard, but sitting still and ploughing with a pen is harder. And I must soon be still!

Daphne had planned too well. To be sure, anything might happen to the car yet. I could scarcely think of anything, not fatal, however, that would prevent our reaching Los Angeles by three-thirty this afternoon, according to Daphne's schedule. We were too near on time, too close to the macadam, for the exciting finish that all of my stars had planned. Here we were, in fact, at Victorville itself, where the macadam did begin, had already begun, and where all hope of something's happening ended, and where nothing was left to me but Daphne and Santa Barbara and the Great Book, which everybody, for so long, has been going to write. It was Daphne who reminded me of the two boys.

CHAPTER XXVI

INTO SANTA BARBARA

We fled from Victorville, the desert still in hot pursuit. But we beat it to the gateway of Cajon Summit, where we made at last our sure escape. The climb to the top of Cajon Pass was over a beautiful piece of engineering, and on an absolutely dry road, at the very sight of which the car began to sing. The car had never seen a dry mountain road before. Even Daphne wanted to know what ailed the machine. And was this, she asked, our own car?

I began to sing, too, something I never did on a mountain road before. Up, up we went, a band of angels waiting for us on the summit. And they caught our chariot there and swung us down Cajon Cañon as around the parapets of Heaven, so intoxicating were the curves, so wide and far below us spread the romantic scene. And here we were, as down from Pisgah, coming into the city of San Bernardino and the Promised Land!

Oranges! Oranges! Oranges! On real orange trees, not on cedar Christmas trees, from whose prickly boughs I saw harvested the very first orange that I ever sucked, and from whose strange boughs I had my annual orange for all those infant years. No, here they hung on glossy-leaved orange trees, rows, orchards, ranches of the dark-green, glossy trees, square miles of Christmas trees, hung and lighted for the child in me!

But only for me to look at! So near to the road they were, yet Hingham was within easier reach than the

nearest orange on the nearest tree. The forbidden apple of Eden was a California orange. Nothing in the great State of California is harder to find than a free wild orange tree, unless it is the burning bush of free speech. You can buy all the oranges you want at Hingham prices, but you shall not pluck one from off an orange tree. An orange on a tree is not only *verboten*, but it is *taboo*. The natives are superstitious of such an orange, and the stranger motoring in quickly learns that he must not even look upon them when they are red, when they give their color to the trees.

I had the adventure of picking one, however, before I was a year in the State. That honor was vouchsafed to me in Redlands, in the back yard of a minister, after I had made one of my regular hundred-dollar speeches before a pet organization of this minister's for my dinner. The plucking of the orange with my own hand was thrown in for Gospel measure, the minister hiding me in his back yard where the Vigilantes would not be likely to observe the act.

Now by the Foothill Boulevard we drifted from San Bernardino through a dreamland — shade of eucalyptus, shade of pepper trees, shade of tropic palms across our way; and bordering the miles of it, hedges of roses, hedges of privet, hedges of heliotrope and geranium, and hedges of oranges by the bucket, by the bushel! Lemons, too, and honey, and ecstasy, and transport, and wonderment — all the way to Claremont! I was for stopping and buying several bushels of the oranges for fear we might not have another such opportunity, but Daphne said she thought the Santa Barbara streets might be cobbled with them. As it turned out there were lemons, lemons everywhere in

Santa Barbara, but as for oranges, we might as well have been in Boston.

I was really perishing for the suck of an orange when a five-ton truck whizzed past us, loaded to the very limit with the juicy gold. Not in all of my life before had I seen so many oranges, at least not in one dazzling heap. But I had dreamed of as many since I was a little boy. I nearly lost control of the car at the sight of my dream come true. What a glorious wreck it would make, I thought! Think of it colliding! If only there were so much as a bump in this too smooth, too wide, too straight boulevard! And while I was wishing that wish the Hesperidean truck slewed suddenly, bounced into the air, and off jounced one of its golden apples! I swooped upon it like a short-stop on a hot grounder from the bat, and was back in the car with it, putting the batter out at first, and on after that truck for a double, or a triple, play! Around a sharp curve ahead swept the big machine and off leaped three more glorious gobs of gold, which I gathered in, and jamming down the accelerator, was once more flying along the trail, Daphne frightened at my behavior and vowing she saw a motor policeman dart out of a side road behind us. Nothing affects the accelerator like a motor policeman, and the car slowed down and came to a pause under the shade of a vine-hung tree in order to let the policeman go past. But Daphne had tricked me, though at the rate we were traveling everything looks like a policeman, of course.

We now had two oranges apiece. Daphne said we would save them until we came to Santa Barbara. I would save mine in my memory, I told her; and what could we say if an officer of the law should ask us how we came by oranges

of that size, for they were of extraordinary bigness, and not to be bought possibly for any price. So I ate mine quickly. Daphne shared my guilt — daintily, but with great gusto and comforting dispatch, declaring that she really would like to buy a bushel of them. But I would buy the whole truck-load, I would, if I could only overtake it!

This was better. Things were coming out right after all. We would certainly stay in California forever, and live the year around in our car, as true Californians do, and watch for orange trucks, and when they pass us we will follow the gleam. Certainly, I told Daphne, we must be getting very near to The Better Country, if, indeed, we had not already arrived.

While all of this was transpiring the panoramic fruit and flower show kept unfolding on both sides of us as we rolled along through places named Glendora, Azusa, Monrovia, Sierra Madre, Lamanda, Pasadena, and Alhambra into Pershing Square, Los Angeles, the clock in the cowl of the car at exactly half after three!

Pershing Square was full of palms and persons, and the streets, on all four sides, were so full of cars that it seemed no more could possibly get in, and that none could ever get out. Los Angeles has more motor cars to the block than the Ford factory at Detroit. Daphne looked around and said she would kiss me for being so nice and prompt about arriving, if only she could see some quiet spot where we could park beneath a palm. I told her I knew of such a place beneath a *pine* back in Hingham.

Thanks to the absent treatment of the traffic officers in Los Angeles, who leave the worst corners to the churning

cars, I got out of one vortex into another with help from behind, and finally into a garage, without undue excitement over traffic laws. In the block between the garage and the hotel we met the 'old party,' with the driving young wife, of the New York car, whom we had not seen since Dodge City.

'She's brought him through,' I remarked to Daphne, as they passed us unrecognized.

But Daphne only said, 'I wonder where she intends to leave him.'

So here we were! Instead of going immediately to our room in the hotel, we sank into deep leather chairs in the lobby and gazed out upon the crowded street. The winter light was fading. The lamps of the city were beginning to flare. Our children would soon be changing from 'The Slim Princess,' their narrow-gauge train of the valley, for the regular sleeper at Owenyo. It would soon be seven-forty in the morning. And we would soon be in Santa Barbara, the journey over, and The Better Country . . .

'I suppose they will be greatly changed,' I observed, chiming in with Daphne's train of thought.

'That's the worst of it,' she replied, sliding her hand into mine. 'I dread these changes. I'm almost afraid to see them, now we're here. If only they don't reprimand us, and tell us the best place for us is home in Hingham!'

'I wonder if it isn't, Daphne?' But she kept silence, and we went up to our room.

One would think that we were going somewhere — back to Boston — at the hour Daphne was up, and the speed with which she got her suitcase packed, instead of merely jogging down to the railroad station. Yet it was our usual

tragic experience at the station, or very near to it. 'Never again!' I told her, as we tore into the Southern Pacific station two minutes late for the seven-forty train. But, thank Heaven, the train was two minutes late, or the clocks were wrong! But what a perfectly disgraceful and perilous scramble we made of it from the hotel to the train!

I simply can't get Daphne to start for church or the railroad station on time. Trains are always late, she claims, and the later you arrive at church, the better pew you get. My car, I will admit, was away back behind a fleet of others at the garage, and the night-man growled in his sleep as he backed and shunted to open a passage for me. Then (and Daphne might have helped me here) I accidentally went to the wrong station — as every newcomer does in Los Angeles. Then I got into a blind street, and found myself in a tangle of tracks and freight cars, on the way to the right station, Daphne vowing we would be late, that we were always late, that she had never known me to arrive anywhere on time — and here to miss the children, of all things!

But for once we were in good time. And the boys were in good time, sweeping us off of our feet as they landed on the platform and tackled us for a down. How big they were, and brown they were, and wholesome they were, and madly glad they were! I rushed them and their mother into the car and drove like Jehu for the cafeteria over at Pershing Square, where each of us seized a platter and helped himself to his own breakfast, after his own kind, and Daphne ate as if she hadn't tasted a mouthful since leaving Hingham.

Los Angeles is a metropolis, and the chief religious ex-

change of the Christian world. You can get what you want, no matter what it is you want, in the way of religion in Los Angeles. The 'Times's' Sunday announcements are veritable pages out of Pentecost, so many are the religious tongues. Sunday in Los Angeles must be a very confusing day to God.

Shaking the dust of the city off of our feet, we passed humbly and softly through Hollywood where America's demi-gods dwell, using neither horn nor cut-out lest we disturb their Olympian slumbers, who have the mind and the manners and the morals of America in their keeping. We did not breathe freely until Hollywood was behind us and Cahuenga Pass, and we were among the fluttering pennants of the Subdividers well on the way to Santa Barbara.

The Santa Monica hills rose to the left of us, the wide San Fernando plain stretched off upon our right, and close along both sides of our road the faith of the California realtor was removing mountains.

A religious fervor is expressed in all Southern California life. Sunday lasts the week around. The spirit of the churches stirs court and college, oil lease and real estate office. California is pantheistic, worshiping the elements, especially the good gods Heat and Moisture; hating and placating the bad gods, Cold and Dry.

They were praying for rain with their lips, and paying a magician rainmaker off in a secluded valley with their hands, this very day. The accumulated rainfall for the past two winters was inches short, for all their paying and praying, though the country as we swung along seemed verdant enough for spring.

Villages and orchards, vegetable and flower farms and chicken ranches sped by us over the constantly varying road, and shortly native trees appeared, especially the native white oak and live-oak, a familiar forest touch on the landscape and welcome to our sylvan shaded eyes. At the outermost thrust of the road on Conejo Grade we stopped to gaze over the bare, brown valley of bean fields below us, a valley that headed into the chaparral-covered hills around which we were drifting. Taking the turn at the bottom, we were among the pumping oil wells, their derricks gone, their weight-hung arms moving slowly close to the earth, as if some lubber giant, some Caliban, might be imprisoned in an empty well below the surface wearily working them.

New-planted walnut orchards, sandy vineyards, and, after a run through a double line of palms, rows and groves of eucalyptus trees were about us, the tall, languid-leaved trees walling the road in like a narrow box-cañon. The shade of them! And the height of them! And the mentholated, antasthmatic breath of them! Their shredded, lacy foliage catches the hot winds and strains the ozone from them, and pours it in a cooling, cleansing flood through every fen and into every fetid pool of one's being. One's whole body breathes until spiracles seem to open in the skin.

Passing Camarillo and El Rio we sped on through Montalvo into an apricot country, and in quick succession crossed the roads to Santa Susana and Santa Paula and came into beautiful Ventura — or was it Mexico and Christmas? All along the main street flamed great gorgeous poinsettias, bushes and small trees of the scarlet glory

blooming in the open, as if the people might keep Christmas in Ventura every day.

We had a whole day yet before Christmas and we needed it, for we did not cut our tree of cedar or piñon pine, as Daphne said we should, back among the mountains on the trail. We must hurry on. And the urge was great, suddenly very great, for in the middle of Ventura I smelled kelp — the ocean!

Let me lick salt! I was parched with inland airs. I was as thirsty as a fingerling salmon for the sea. Born in the fields, bred in brackish water on a tide-river, I breathe best the mingled air of barns, hay-filled, and clam-flats when the tide is low.

Across the bridge over Ventura River and we were running with the sea, this Rincon Road literally laid upon the sand, when not on piles among the fingering waves. The beach was alive with birds, white and black pelicans, and curlews, Hudsonian curlews, probing as far as we could see along the shore. And here we had a flat tire.

Daphne thought we might go on to Santa Barbara and change it there. But the boys pounced upon it like terriers on a rat. Nothing of this sort had happened to us since long before we left Hingham Harbor on the Atlantic side, and Daphne said she was of a notion that it never occurred with the best of drivers. The boys fell into each other's arms at the observation. They were entirely frank with me about my driving, but they assured their mother that, all things considered, in their honest judgment I had done rather well to get from shore to shore really without a puncture — this one having come off after we arrived.

Calling me back from the curlews long before I was ready

to come, the boys showed me the Ventura nail from the punctured tire, and, climbing in on top of the luggage with the jack, shouted 'Let's go!' So we went — and we came to Santa Barbara. But no one can make that run around Point Rincon, through Carpinteria and Montecito into Santa Barbara, and ever hope to cover such magic miles again, or ever come closer to The Better Country.

CHAPTER XXVII

CASA LOMA

It was all as dear Astrid had tried to picture it. No, it was not at all as she had pictured it, nor as I shall picture it, for the Santa Ynez Mountains and the California sky and the western sea that framed it are not to be drawn in words. The long winding drive beneath the spreading palms was as she described it; so was the little pond, Laguna Blanca, and the turning road up through the old live-oaks to the open hilltop, the gardener's lodge, the house, Casa Loma, and Casita, my den, and the green oval with its drive and palms and sundial, and the lantana in bloom all over the long brown front of the bungalow clear to the covings — these we had glimpsed through her camera and letters. But is there any camera that can hear and feel and breathe and weep and laugh and sing and pray? If there is such a camera, Casa Loma has need of it; only it must be able to write as well, or else it shall fail as Astrid failed, and as I shall fail.

The door of Casa Loma stood wide open. The very house was a welcome to us. Everything within the cool, ample rooms, everything without in the ample grounds and gardens, was a gracious invitation. But Astrid — no, we must not feel so, not think, 'If only she were here!' Still in her twenties, and like her name, but lovelier than any star! Everything as she had left it, everything that she most loved, was here — for us! If only she were here, then had there been no hurt in my throat, no pain in my heart, and

Daphne would not have looked out over the hills of Hope Ranch through unbidden tears. But the hills hurt, too.

Limping up, the old gardener formally turned us over the keys. He was glad to see us, he said, glad to have us live in the empty houses, and walk in the gardens, especially when the breeze came in from the sea of the afternoons at four. The flowers would blossom better now, he said, looking at Daphne, with her love to them. And I told him that there wasn't a closed gentian in the world but would open if Daphne came along. But the old Santa Barbara gardener didn't seem to know what a closed gentian was. And as I came to think it over I wondered if it were not a doubtful compliment that I had paid to Daphne.

Not for five years had Astrid, the most beautiful flower that ever blossomed in her Casa Loma gardens, walked here in the cool of the evening to love and bless her own. The flowers had been tended by the limping old gardener; but they needed love, her love who had brought them into being, the light of her sweet eyes in which they had first opened their own, her touch and presence in the garden for which now these many seasons they had watched and pined. A lonesome, yearning garden must sicken finally under the best professional skill in the world.

Leaving Daphne and the boys, I went down to the end of The Philosopher's Walk to carry Astrid's love, as in her last letter, directly to the baby eucalyptus trees which she had planted with her own hands just before going away. There they stood, a line of slender, leafless stems, brown and dead. I hurried down to the end of The Poet's Walk. All were dead. Lower down the hill, in the deeper shade at the end of The Lover's Walk, one tiny sapling of all her

loving travail held on to life in the hope of her return. I plucked a pointed, aromatic leaf to send to her across the sea. One leaf was all that the little tree could spare. But that was more than Astrid would have asked the greatest tree to give, if the plucking of a leaf were pain. And this was pain. Yet I took it, knowing well that the little tree was dying for Astrid, and with this healing message to her it could die in peace. How many times I would die for Daphne rather than try to live without her!

No one could stay indoors. The wonder of everything about us, especially the humming of bees in the garden, utterly unsettled me. It seemed impossible to get ready for Christmas. It seemed impossible that day after to-morrow could be Christmas, or any day like this could ever be Christmas. I tried to feel like Christmas, but I couldn't. I couldn't feel like anything that I had ever felt like before. And it was so with Daphne; though not with the boys. They felt just like native sons of California, as if they had never lived in Hingham, and had never hoped it would snow for Christmas!

'Why, they seem to think the whole world is theirs,' I whispered in awe to Daphne.

'And it *is* all theirs. And if there is nothing wonderful in it to them, it's because they are so wonderful to themselves,' she answered wisely.

We were even more remote from neighbors than we had been on our hill in Hingham. No one lived in sight of Casa Loma nearer than the foothills far across the valley. At the end of the upper walk we could look down over a portion of Santa Barbara, five miles away; but the Tip-Top House on La Cumbre seemed quite as close. An empty clubhouse

stood over in the bean fields of Hope Ranch, and behind the bean fields stood the blue sky and the Santa Ynez Range northward; the sky, the mesa, the live-oak hills southward, and a brown bowl in the mesa full of the azure, or the emerald, or the sapphire sea.

Our trouble with Christmas began with the electric range in the kitchen. We had never cooked with anything but wood in Hingham. And then what would a Vermont turkey taste like out of cold storage in California? Of course we couldn't get Cape Cod cranberries out here — an unthinkable situation! And outside was the weather, not Christmas weather at all, but regular Fourth-of-July weather. Who wanted to cook indoors all day when all outdoors was such a feast?

Besides, we had cut no tree on the way across, and had never *bought* a Christmas tree in all of our lives, having had our own to cut for ourselves. Cutting the tree is an essential part of our celebration. Where in all of California could we go and cut our own tree? Then, too, we had left our 'Christmas Carol' at home. We always read 'The Christmas Carol' aloud during the week before Christmas so as to feel like Scrooge's nephew. And how ridiculous it would be to go to bed here and have mother stand under a dim light in the hall outside our bedrooms and read us

> 'Twas the night before Christmas,
> And all through the house —

with wire screens on the windows, and lantana bushes in bloom outside clear up to the eaves!

Humbug on Christmas! We felt as much like Christmas as old Scrooge himself before the Ghosts visited him. So we

held a conference, and decided to go to Santa Barbara and buy our Christmas dinner, and forget it. And if ever we all did get together again in Hingham, we would have double portions of turkey and cranberry, with seconds of pie and pudding and everything, and the very biggest tree the house could hold, and so make good this unnatural Santa Barbara Christmas.

The day following Christmas the boys and I lined up the honey bees, working the blossoms of the grevillea hedge in the garden, and traced them to their lair, a bent live-oak up the wooded slope, less than half a mile from the house. Farther over in Hope Ranch toward the shore, a pair of coyotes had a den and howlery, or, perhaps, a snarlery. Quite regularly toward sunset they would come out on a platform far above us and put on 'Midnight in Jungle Land'; and if there were more than two coyotes doing it there were surely twenty. Wild rabbits, pack-rats, and California spotted ground squirrels scurried everywhere. Down in Laguna Blanca, the little fresh-water pond at the turn of the road, was a flock of several whistling swans, migrants from the Arctics, wintering here, the only wild swans I had ever seen. The pond was alive with birds, and Casa Loma was alive with excitement for the holidays, so that when the boys went back to the desert at the end of the week, they had not seen my pen, nor had I thought of my great book. Daphne had, of course, but I had rather neatly prevented its being projected into the holiday agenda.

Now the boys were gone and Daphne and I were once more returned to each other and our great adventure. I had some odds and ends of writing to finish before I could

begin to think continuously about the book which I resigned from the University, and traveled to California, to write. Some chapters in a book about bees must be done first. After that I wished to round out a series of studies on the conservation of wild life for a possible volume, good busy-work while the great project, the *magnum opus*, should mull in my mind, should shape itself in my spirit before coming into the shape of words.

So I was installed in Casita, not in front of the big plate-glass window of the tiny living-room, where I could look down on Laguna Blanca and the swans, but out in the sleeping-porch on the south of the cottage with a table, a chair, a couch, and the clapboards to gaze at. Here Daphne would have locked me up for four hours of writing in the morning and two hours of meditating the great book in the afternoon, only there was no key to this sleeping-porch and the hook of the door was on the inside. Under the pillow of the couch I slipped my field-glasses.

Writing is hard work. I am not one to shirk hard work; but it was very difficult for me to keep my mind off of the swans. They were rare birds. All I had to do was to step out on the other porch with my glasses. However, the bee book *must* be finished.

All through January, February, and up to the middle of March I wrote out of doors in the sleeping-porch of Casita; and saw many a wild-bird thing going on within the tule walls down in Laguna Blanca. I don't believe California is a very good place to write in. There are too many birds. Everything that could fly seemed to come daily, and especially in the morning, to Laguna Blanca, it being an artificial, fresh-water pond, and the only one with fresh

water, except the reservoir, anywhere about Santa Barbara.

Then there was a little orange tree, in bloom, and squeaking with hummingbirds, directly under the sleeping-porch. Two large kumquat trees were in blossom beyond the orange; and later, when the several species of acacias came into misty flower, and the flood of spring migrants was upon me, I was never more miserable in my life.

Daphne, poor thing, was in despair. I hadn't completed the bee book, and all the bird-lovers in Santa Barbara were inviting me a-birding everywhere. Daphne said there were distractions enough to literary work in Hingham, but here the number of birds and bird-snoopers, and the amount of loafing weather, was positively lethal. How California could ever produce any literature was more than she could see.

But why write about bees, I argued, while there was still one more wild bee-tree to be lined up in the woods? As between living and writing, give me life. Writing is done by those who hate life and law and children born in wedlock. What is there of literary value about such a child? Normal people like us cannot write. And normal life like ours can't be written about. I've got to do something irregular, I tell her; and she's got to sue me for it; and we've got to raise Hell generally before I can begin on my big book. All she answers is that I have plenty of such material now if I only had the courage to use it.

Link by link grew the chain of golden days binding us to Casa Loma. I wrote, and kept the bird-glasses under the pillow. Daphne guarded me like a dear dragon. If she knew about the glasses, she said nothing, but kept herself the busier scaring the birds away.

Every morning at ten o'clock a little breeze slipped through the screen and brushed the back of my neck. I turned up my coat collar and plodded on with my pen. Every afternoon exactly at four o'clock a bigger breeze would blow in from the ocean. Our day's work ended, and back from our tramp about the wooded heights, we would sit under the bending oak at the end of the house and watch the sun go down into the Pacific, and later, as it swung farther northward, watch it sink behind the chocolate hills of Hope Ranch. Then the blue curtain over us would fade, and such a pageant cross the sky that we scarce dared behold it, for fear of ever touching the drab stuff of words again, or hanging a dab of color, framed, upon our narrow walls.

Soon the gray twilight rolls down about Casa Loma. Far away on the mesa a coyote barks. A wild drake answers him from behind the tall tule walls of Laguna Blanca, now white indeed as ashes of silver under the dusky sky. Daphne draws her shawl about her shoulders, and asks me to go in and light the fire of eucalyptus sticks, and says she will read to me, if I will promise not to go to sleep.

CHAPTER XXVIII

SPICE-BUSH AND BLOODROOT AND ARBUTUS

We had been coming across the 'line' in all kinds of weather except wet. Yesterday a high wind and sand-storm scoured the already polished sky, instead of the dampening rain we longed for. The old peace-at-any-price had the upper hand again this morning, the sun wearing his permanent, all-winter smile. Acclimated as I was to New England March mud, I did not kiln-dry and rub down well, but cracked and scarified. Daphne was quite out of patience with me.

'Not much like Massachusetts, is it?' I remarked, as she came into my writing-lodge, drawing a chair to the big window overlooking Laguna Blanca, the Sierras and the sea.

'Very much like it, truly, only not real, so thrilling is it and divine! How the mountains yonder make Mullein Hill to shrivel!'

'Shame on you, Daphne! The Hills of Hingham are not the Sierras.'

'One might think they were to read what you have written about them.'

'Don't be funny, dear. These Sierras are good in their way — for condors and clouds, when there are any. But for a home — a hill in Hingham! All you can do with these Santa Ynez peaks is to look at them.'

'That's all I want to do with them,' she murmured quietly. 'And I could look at them forever.'

'So could I, if it would only rain, and I hadn't you to look at. With that outfit you are wearing, and the Cherokee rose in your hair, I could look forever, too.'

'Now don't *you* be funny, for it isn't natural,' turning a trifle from the window toward me. 'How does this new dress make me look — seriously?'

'Just like a party, and not as if you had been gardening and gathering flowers.'

'You see,' she went on, 'gathering flowers *is* a party. I must dress as a compliment to them.'

Her cutting-basket was full of roses. One pink Cherokee, the tone of her cheek exactly, was tucked under the high-backed comb in her snowy hair. The old shell-pink cameo in the V at her throat, matching the rose in her hair, simply spoiled her five and fifty years, and set me back to one and twenty, where she has always kept me.

I was one and twenty, and a student at the biological laboratory in Woods Hole when I made the scientific experiment of kissing her. Up to that moment I had been working on the bryozoa of the Atlantic coast. She handed me a bigger biological problem. In her brown hair that August day she wore a pink wild rose.

'But tell me, seriously,' she repeated, 'how much do you like this new frock? What does it make me look like?'

'Like your wedding day. You were all in white. You carried lady fern and blossoming wintergreen. It was four o'clock of the Sunday afternoon. The Kennebec was full of floating logs. And far off, as I saw you approaching through the broken lights among the sweet deep shadows of the pines, you seemed to me like Beatrice coming to meet Dante . . .'

She was stuffing her fingers so tight into her ears that they must have hurt.

'Nonsense!' she cried. 'You don't know what I wore that day, whether it was white or black.'

'Well, I wasn't thinking of your dress, Daphne.'

'Nor of me, either. You forgot to kiss me. You were simply shocking. Marriage is shocking anyway. But to have the neglect begin at the altar!'

'I've tried to make amends for it these thirty years,' I said.

'Thirty years! Does a man think he can expiate that sin in thirty years?'

She took up her basket of roses and came over to my writing-table, a sweeter fragrance than of flowers filling the airy room.

'Is it the bee-book?' she asked, eyeing the unreadable manuscript. 'Stick to your bees and your essay. Fiction is not your forte, nor women. Never, never, though you may have known one for thirty years, never try to describe a woman. Your masterpiece won't be a novel.' And, picking up my bird-glasses, which I had forgot to hide under the pillow, she moved off with them, saying, 'I think I had better take these up to the house. I've wasted a lot of your time. And if that black flycatcher arrives this morning from Mexico, you'll get nothing written to-day. I think I had better lock you in, too, till lunch-time.'

From under the roses in the basket she produced a handful of ripe kumquats, remarking, as she laid them on the table, 'These will brighten and stay you. It's bees now, remember, till I let you out for lunch.'

Bees! When I might write about a woman like that!

Why couldn't I write a novel? I can tell a story. And isn't Daphne as good material as the Lost Lady? Perhaps I am unacquainted with the literary virtues of lost ladies. Daphne thinks I am. But this current lost-lady fiction leaves me cold. I wish a truly great novelist would take a lady like Daphne for a story.

Every morning Daphne slips into the lodge on her round through the gardens — to arrange the vase of flowers in my writing-room, ostensibly. I tell her that a man can't write every minute of the morning. The spirit must move. For poetry, yes; but not for the essay, she claims. Besides, she says, I have a waiting disposition, and my moving spirit does not always move me to write.

How could it in California with all outdoors calling me? One cannot write outdoors. Perhaps Hingham is the best place for me after all; and my sciatica, who knows, may be my chief literary asset.

Take a March morning like this, and the languid breeze with its load of odors: roses, orange blossoms, and the breath of the slender acacia trees, veiled like brides with trailing bloom! Think of this for a literary atmosphere! It is not for writing but for dreaming, fitter for swooning than for swinking, as Chaucer himself has declared, when even a single breath of it drifts over England in the spring. Three species of hummingbirds are zipping about the grevillea hedge, fighting each other desperately, the Anna sallying out from the tip of the poinsettia bush, where he sings as if he had a needle in his throat. And any minute the black flycatcher, phainopepla, may arrive from Mexico. It is easy to see the advantages of a Massachusetts March for literary purposes. There is more weather than ink in literature.

A haunting, half-familiar scent in the air lately, of the soil, it may be, coming up from the harrowed bean fields of Hope Ranch on the winds of the sea, which is altogether distracting; for it is more than the elemental smell of earth: there is history in it, and romance, as if the plough had struck some ancient Indian olla buried in the mesa, full of gums, resins, nards, and essences out of the spring-drenched Mohave or out of tropic Yucatan.

> The wandering airs they faint
> On the dark, the silent stream —
> The Champak odours fail
> Like sweet thoughts in a dream —

while I sit struggling with the flesh and the devil in the shape of an unfinished essay! I tell Daphne that if I must *work* in order to be saved, then I pray her to go back with me to Hingham.

Is this lassitude and defeat the overwhelming effect of too much ease and beauty? I am just returned from a visit to the Cooper Ranch and its far-famed lemon eucalyptus tree, a dream-of-a-tree. And I am completely upset by it in all of my earth-born standards and desires. Have I ever seen another living form so fair? Did I ever feel before the ineffable pain of perfection in shape and spirit?

The tree may stand a hundred feet in air, three round branches, clothed in samite, springing from the bole far from the ground as lovely as the arms of girls. Rinded in satin, clean and rosy white as tinted dawn, it lifts its slender form and spreads its open top against the sky, as if its leaves were flocks of flying swallows, or, in a lively wind, some lacy scarf blown from the marble shoulder of a goddess on the clouds.

Of this particular tree a Santa Barbara poet sings:

> Straight as a sunbeam and divinely tall,
> As silver fine, refined without a trace
> Of earthliness, the embodiment of grace,
> Purity, slender loveliness, of all
>
> That man adores in sheltered maidenhood,
> Serene you stand there in the morning light
> In the deep garden, radiant in white,
> To make the name of 'lady' understood.

In such forms, and at certain moments, the beauty of Santa Barbara seems not of our clay, not a fit garment for me to wear, the coarser cloth of Hingham more becoming to me by far.

Where have so many flowers died, where are such hosts of them alive as here? The very soil is composed of fallen flowers. From all the world over flower gardens are in congress at Santa Barbara, holding eternal festival. Is there a spicy root or bud in Araby, any balm in Gilead, nectar, attar, musk or myrrh among the South Americas, or petaled thing in sea-girt Polynesia not breathed or breathing in Santa Barbara?

There is one plant, I think, or have I missed it? April is almost upon us, and I have searched in cañon and arroyo for a bed of blossoming arbutus, but I have searched in vain. Yet I know a certain ledgy slope near Mullein Hill where, if the spring is forward, I can pick arbutus abloom in March.

Why search the cold, mouldy leaves on the wet hills of Hingham for arbutus when in Santa Barbara I can have the big tubas of the tree-like datura to bloom? Don't ask me why. Ask Daphne. She never hunted arbutus in the

wet woods of Ohio when she was a child. I cannot answer, for I am sick with waiting for the spring — my spring with its spice-bush and bloodroot and arbutus.

For the spring? I came to Santa Barbara for the winter. But there has been no winter. The twenty-first of March has come and gone; the sun crossed the equinoctial line on the appointed day; yet nothing happened. It is all wrong. If no winter comes, then no spring — or at best spring will be very far behind.

CHAPTER XXIX

SOMETHING WANTING YET

'AREN'T they gorgeous!' she exclaimed.

We had been visiting friends and had returned to Casa Loma with an actual carload of cut flowers.

'They remind me of a funeral,' I replied.

'Still hankering for skunk-cabbage and the spring? Listen!' and she pulled the Los Angeles 'Times' out of her brief-case, thrusting under my eye a typical weather headline.

MUD FALLS IN
RAIN AND SNOW

Midwest Experts Puzzled by Precipitation

Zero Weather in Wake of Northwest Blizzard

Eastern Floods Receding Except in Ohio

[EXCLUSIVE DISPATCH]

CHICAGO, March 31.—Red mud fell with the snow today in Wilmette and other north-shore suburbs . . .

'Are you so hard up for home news that you take to this Eastern weather stuff, Daphne? California makes that news here on the spot. The highest-paid fiction writer on this coast is the man who manufactures Chicago weather for the newspapers of Los Angeles. They keep a salaried rain-maker up in Coalinga, but his popularity is as nothing to the fakir's who stirs up this daily blizzard on the Great Lakes.'

Daphne laid a gentle finger on my lips.

'What would dear Astrid say if she heard you raving like this? Is your sciatica worse to-day?'

'How is yours to-day, Daphne?'

'I haven't any.'

'You simply won't admit it, that's all.'

'I will admit anything, and glory in everything — in going on to sixty if you like. But if I am as young as I ever was,' pinning a half-blown rose, a ravishing Irish Flame, under the old cameo at her throat, 'whose fault is it but yours? Haven't you told me daily for thirty years that I look as lovely as on the day you first beheld me?'

'Not *be*held you, dear, but held . . .'

'You didn't hold me that day!' she retorted, looking me boldly, pityingly in the eye. 'You held only my hand. You timid lover!'

'It wasn't my fault if I didn't,' I declared doggedly.

'Whose was it, then?' — with infinite incredulity. 'I suppose it was mine! You dashing thing!' — and tossing me a daring, defying smile she turned to go.

'Don't you spoil . . . this . . . rose!' she cried, standing me off resolutely. 'Stop where you are, sir! It's the only Irish Flame I have ever worn' — and she was gone.

What dear audacity! Has a mere man the ghost of a chance with such a high-handed creature? I have sworn so often that I held her that day on Mowing Hill, the whole of her, that I'm convinced I did. She swears that I didn't, and swears she won't forgive me, and that our five children are nothing of an atonement, there being some things that a woman can't forget and won't forgive.

I helped Daphne most of the afternoon arranging the house for that carload of cut flowers; and when the house was full we had the kitchen sink full, both bathtubs, and the washboiler. They go in for flowers at Santa Barbara, their only drawback being the scarcity of people to give them to.

When we were through, the house looked ready for a wedding — I won't say funeral, though something about so many cut flowers always makes me feel that way, some numbing memory out of my childhood, doubtless, which was very fragrant of funerals. But something more than over-fragrant blossoms depressed me to-day. Old, mal-odorous doubts and dread decisions thronged me; and, leaving Daphne among her flowers like a bride, I went out to a bench in the garden where I could think alone.

The sun was resting for a moment on the broad, brown shoulders of Hope Ranch, his level beams splintering against my bench in the hanging garden where a small lizard, who had come out to think before me, had gone sound asleep. He woke up in time to avoid being sat upon, scurried down into the hot sand at my feet, and, sprawling against a spot of sunshine, sank into sleep again.

Such a meditative, or such a weary, or such a lazy lizard! All but the tip of his tail, which twitched, twitched,

twitched, much like one's sciatic nerve, really overmuch alive! I looked down at him, trying to fathom his genius for resting, his prodigious capacity for absorbing sleep, my own increasing capacity giving edge to my mind. Was it some reptilian hangover which lent this lazy tint to my blood? Or was it this California country slowing me down with too much sunshine, drugging me with too much perfume, cozening me with years and languors into shirking and unessential ease?

Shadowy hands pulled the warm, golden covers off of the little saurian. He woke, crawled after them into the last patch of sunshine, and slept again. I stirred. Cocked was his head in an instant. He looked at me, winked the off eye, snapped up a passing ant, then flattened all of his body to the heat and once more began to doze.

Slowly sank his chin until it rested on the sand; wider and thinner stretched the mazy pattern of his hide for every wavy scale to catch the warmth; out reached his arms and legs with claws extended limp upon the couch; and all was limp to the tip of his twitching tail. A black ant took a short cut across him and passed on, so deep were his dreams, so wide open was every tiny door and window of his being, so far was his spirit fled! But it was his limp legs that I envied, each with its raveled sleeve of care spread out to sleep — Sleep the good knitter working in the sun.

For the sleeve of my right leg is still much raveled. But then, when was I ever wholly knitted up? And why, on Sundays, since childhood, when I have been least frayed, have I been most conscious of my clothes? And what would Daphne do without her mending? What would happen to me if my right leg were mended and I should cease to know

I had any such a leg, or any other leg, or any arms, for that matter, or any body, or soul?

Days of depressing sunshine succeeded each other over Casa Loma, unbroken and, toward the last, uncounted. Wood-doves cooed sadly in the live-oaks as if mourning for the spring. The red-shafted flickers yarruped and drummed just as their crazy, yellow-shafted cousins do in Hingham. 'Bermuda! Bermuda!' called the passing bluebirds plaintively, though probably not a migrant of them had ever been there, as have our bluebirds at home.

One morning a Rocky Mountain bluebird touched earth at Casa Loma — at the rim of the bird-bath in the garden, for a sip of water, and maybe to cleanse himself (so ethereal he seemed!) from any earthy, migratory stain. He is not of Hingham. We have no such skyey stranger there. Our Eastern bird has earth all over his breast, rich, russet earth — a better bird for me. There is sky enough upon his back; and there is nothing but heaven in his dear sweet voice, and in his eyes, the most innocent eyes in the world.

This mountain bluebird is pure, unutterable blue and pure pain. Like an azure spirit it paused upon the flaring bowl of the fountain, splashed in the sparkling light for a moment and vanished, leaving both Daphne and me with something — something from dear Astrid! It was her messenger, probably, descending not only with her peace upon us, but once again with her prayer that we remain in Santa Barbara and make Casa Loma our home.

And we would stay in spite of the ants. Never had I seen or dreamed so many marching armies of ants as besieged Casa Loma. And there were exactly as many

armies countermarching. They started from nowhere. They arrived nowhere. They advanced across the hill. They advanced down the hill. They retreated up the hill. They retreated across the hill. Up the trees and down the trees. In on one telephone wire; out on the other telephone wire, a creeping insulation. They carried nothing. They fetched nothing. They gently touched antennæ as they passed. And evermore they passed, marching and countermarching, red ants, black ants, midget ants, giant ants, marching and countermarching. Now and then a lizard would destroy one. On marched and countermarched the armies, making ready to destroy the lizards, and Daphne and me, and Casa Loma, and California, and the continent.

Yet they avoided open war. No ant so far forgot his orders as to bite us; and though on review days the outside walls of the house were encrusted with them, we never saw an ant overstep our threshold, except in the half-open kitchen, and invade our rights.

So Daphne and I determined that we would stay on in California. The dusty, two years'-drouth might any hour be broken now; the hoof-and-mouth disease was abating, and its quarantine against the dirt roads would soon be lifted: there had not been the tremor of an earthquake felt in Santa Barbara for over a hundred years; and here came a cablegram from Astrid saying, 'Casa Loma is yours forever!'

For once we would do the reasonable thing and stay. Nothing is so hard to do, or is so seldom done, as the reasonable thing. We had never done it. One night, after a day of debate and enervating indecisions, Daphne said

she had something to read to me. I knew from long experience, by her manner and tone, that it was something I had written with which she was now to confront me.

She brought out her writing-pad, and from its pocket drew some faded pages of print. A cold sweat broke over me, for I recognized the pages of my old college magazine and my class-day poem.

'Now listen, please,' and she began:

I would forget all lore
Of musty volumes, and the store
Of men's philosophy;
The baubles of society;
Would forget its walls and streets,
Its little joys, its small deceits;
If the sunshine of the morn
Were in my bosom born,
And the fragrance of the rose,
And the joy a skylark knows;
If the instinct of the bee
Could only enter me;
If the courage of the pine
And its mightiness were mine.

All I've learned of books and men
I would return again,
If the softness of the night,
In her softly-shadowed stole,
If the largeness of the light
Might pass into my soul.

'Please, desist, Daphne! I beg you. Don't read me the next lines. Can't you remember that I was a college boy then, and . . .'

'I do remember that you were a college boy, and that you sent me these very pages in a letter, and alas! what hopes I had for you. I remember too well. For how have

you changed since, except to become a worse poet? In spite of all my hopes and prayers . . .'

'And other things, Daphne, less easy to live down!'

'In spite of my hopes and prayers,' she went on, 'and my being keel and compass to you . . .'

'And ballast, Daphne. You have been a lot of ballast.'

'Well, ballast, if you wish. But what I couldn't be was rudder. And . . .'

'But you've been a steady breeze, Daphne.'

'Breeze, then, and ballast, and keel, and compass — if only I could have been rudder, too, and steered you from Cathay! But here are the lines of your youth, which still speak for you:

> Beautiful old world,
> How large thou art, and free!
> Free of thy life and love to give —
> That the river flow, the blind-worm live,
> And more than all to me!
>
> And large thou art, brave world, although
> The few who wander far and wide
> With restless soul unsatisfied
> Will seek, but never find thee so.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> I would be glad to find and know
> All majesty of truth, and throw
> The light across the darkened sea
> Of man's futurity.
> But let me be content to feel
> The thrill of bird-song sweetly steal
> Into the hours;
> And glad to bring
> The fall of waters or the gleam
> Of misty sunshine from their foam
> Into some urban home.

Just to grow as the grasses grow,
Just to know all the wild birds know;
This were enough for me —
But for a doubt, and vain regret,
A something that is wanting yet . . .

And she slipped back the brittle pages into her writing-pad where they had worried her these hopeful, prayerful years.

For a long time neither of us spoke. Then she said, gazing into the open fire,

'Maybe I was the "something that is wanting yet" when you penned that poem?'

'Maybe you were, dear.'

'Now I'm the "vain regret."'

'You're the whole world to me, Daphne!'

'Perhaps I am. But I'm not the earth to you, nor even your thirty-five acres in Hingham. Ever since you've had me there has been something that "is wanting yet" — more acres, mostly, and trees, and sheds, and pigs, and horses, and hired men. A million times you've made me think of Ahab in Naboth's garden.'

'But I never once made you think of David with Uriah's ewe lamb.'

'Don't be irrelevant, please. And don't try to shunt all serious talk. Your whole life you've longed for leisure and beauty. And here it is in Casa Loma, as if you were Aladdin with the lamp! And yet down deep in your heart you're set on going back to Hingham. I don't understand it.'

'I don't either, Daphne. Except that Hingham is like the pain in my leg — I'm used to it.'

Another long silence. Daphne dies hard in an argument,

and I knew that she had not unmasked the big gun. Laying her magazine upon the table she rose and came over by the fire.

'I think I'll go to bed,' she remarked. 'But there is one thought I'd like to leave with you: Our chief business in Hingham has been the children. What satisfaction can we have there now — in your garden, say, with all the bugs, but with not a boy at home?' — and without stopping for my ready answer she was gone.

For I was ready. My mind had gradually resolved this problem of me and my children. The children had *not* been our chief business in Hingham — not mine, anyhow. And they were not going to be my chief business there or anywhere. They certainly had never made me their chief business. Did Daphne think that my gardening had only to do with bugs and boys? To be sure there were bugs. Every man's garden is a World Court of Bugs, a League of Nations for the weeds of all the earth. But I had long since developed an international mind for my hoe, the League of Nations being a very part of my religion.

I could handle the weeds and bugs; but how could I hoe against four absent boys? I had worked that out, too, though not happily. From being six — seven with the pig — we were now but two. I must plough and plant and hoe for Daphne; and she must cook for me — and both of us reducing!

Gardening, like life and the rolling ages, needs an increasing purpose. But mine was all at once diminishing. Since last spring the garden had been cut down from a six-mess scale to a scale of two, and I simply cannot think in terms of a plough and two persons; or a load of barnyard

dressing and two persons; or a potato patch and two persons, one of whom is slightly off her starchy feed.

All winter long I had secretly plotted the garden in Hingham. Fifty times I had planted it. Fifty times I had dug it up in despair. Heretofore in the short days of December, in the long snows of February, and during the thaws of March and April, this planting on paper had yielded me immense anticipatory crops.

A garden by lamplight before the winter fire! A garden without a weed, without a worm, without a single head of lettuce run to stalk! Is Santa Barbara itself so sure a cure for winter as such a paper garden?

Unless it is a garden for two! At first I could not plot the garden for two. I could not ponder seed catalogues for two. I could not send an order to my seedsman for *two*. If Adam gardened in the sweat of his brow, that's because he had only Eve besides himself to garden for. She, poor thing, had to cook her country messes for only him. He went without a hot dinner very often, I know, until Cain and Abel came. You *can* bake one potato; but who is going to heat up a big oven for a single lonely tuber when you are advised to use whole-wheat bread as a substitute?

Still less inspiring is it to *raise* one potato. You think of potatoes in patches, and they seem naturally to grow in patches. I had always been able to wave a large hand over my potato patch. Now when I get back to Hingham I can only point to a row. I must then buy my fertilizer by the pound like coffee; must carry it to the garden in a tomato can; must cut my seed potato with a penknife: borrow Daphne's atomizer to spray the vines with Paris green; and in the fall . . .

I cannot yet contemplate the fall.

When the children were all at home, and we had a pig and two cows and a hundred hens, gardening was both pastime and profit, as it must be, else be without the right incentive. The good garden yearns to be devoured. Who can grow vivid, slender cucumbers and unaffectedly watch them become jaundiced and dropsical, and go into a decline? The sight of a pretty scarlet radish spreading with middle age, and gouty and bloated, is entirely shocking. I simply won't raise vegetables any more for my unbending, undiscerning, unpoetical neighbors. I would for Daphne, only she is so small an eater! And so I tried to reason — only to hit a rock and break the nose of my plough!

Then I saw the light — growing clearer all the way to Hingham. It was too late for me to hang up the real hoe. When a man has literally hoed himself past five and fifty, he had better keep on hoeing — if he can. And if his children go away, let him buy pigs. For quantity try variety — eggplant, wongbok, hot peppers, salsify, okra, peanuts, chives, mushrooms, and the like, as I shall certainly do if we get back in time.

It might at first seem extravagant to raise pedigree vegetables for a pig. But I shall get me a pedigree pig. As an incentive to planting there is something positively inspiring in a pig.

I wished Daphne hadn't gone to bed. I wanted to tell her that there is no need to stay forever in Santa Barbara because we are only two. Two are company, good company, she and I; but we will go back to Hingham now and get a pig, and that will be a crowd.

CHAPTER XXX

THE BETTER COUNTRY

The pig prevailed. At least it seemed as if the flesh prevailed. Or is it the triumph of the spirit that returns a man from another's vine and fig tree to his own vine and elm tree? For the elm tree by no stretch of the imagination can be thought of as a fig tree.

I can make a whole meal of luscious, candied figs. Fig trees are broad-leaved, long and abundant bearers, and grow lustily in Santa Barbara. Few trees are of slower growth than the elm, or tougher, crosser-grained, or barrener of fruit. An elm leaf never adorned Eve or any of her daughters. And yet among the trees of Santa Barbara, eucalyptus, live-oak, fig and palm and pepper, my eye has thirsted for a wine-glass elm. Useless, fruitless in the rocky pastures of old Hingham, they stand like tall-stemmed, flaring goblets on the hills, brimmed with 'lucent syrops, tinct with cinnamon,' and something sweeter far than cinnamon or the caramel of figs, something wakeful for the slumberous, sensuous spirit, which is poured into them from the decanter of the sky.

It was the thirtieth of May, and the morning was at eleven, when I brought the loaded car up to the stoop of Casa Loma. The color and quality of that day can never fade. For me — I may not speak for Daphne — there cannot be another day so fair. And I thought there could never be another scene so wondrous fair as that which

Casa Loma looked upon, down from La Cumbre to the sea.

We were leaving Casa Loma — leaving the doors of the house wide open, the curtains up, the lantana at every window looking in. We were leaving sticks in the fireplace of the big cool room ready for the flame and our book when we should return. For we shall return, we told the gardener. We shall return, we told each other. We shall return, we told Astrid by letter in answer to her cablegram giving us Casa Loma forever and a day. We shall return — after we have gone back to Hingham.

We must return to Hingham first. There were so many things we needed to do in Hingham, and nothing which we needed to do in Santa Barbara. Yet it was the Country Of-Nothing-To-Do which we had set out to find. And we were turning our backs upon it! The Better Country was to be beautiful, too, as beautiful as Santa Barbara. And there was to be no winter there — just as in Santa Barbara. Then why were we going back to Hingham?

Down the chaparral-covered hillside the plumed quail, noisy birds, were calling, 'You're going away! You're going away! Why don't you stay? Why don't you stay?' — their harsh voices and insistent query irritatingly personal. We were going away as everything knew — to Pasadena to-night for a lecture; then up Owen's River Valley and over the Inyos to see the children in Deep Springs Valley for a night; thence by the Midland Trail to Goldfield and Salt Lake City and Laramie, Wyoming, for the University commencement address on the eleventh of June — that's *why*, if these prying California quail were determined to know why. But I should have to take them with me before

they could understand, not being migratory birds themselves, and never having heard the call, nor felt the pain, of home.

So they kept repeating, 'You're going away! Why don't you stay?' until neither Daphne nor I could bear the presence of each other. For we had not honestly answered even the quail, to say nothing of ourselves and Astrid. I didn't try to explain to the old gardener. Nor did he try to understand, for he had grown used to the empty house, and the gardens wasting their sweetness on him alone. He had stopped wondering at the rich who have many mansions and wander homeless up and down the world.

We had ceased from reasoning, that was plain, and were acting from instinct, obeying some inner, ancestral urge, deeper-seated than our common sense and more powerful than our so-called wills. Daphne prided herself upon her free will and abiding common sense. Her impotence and confusion now were pathetic. She was heavy in spirit. I left her going from room to room, closing the piano, adjusting portières, putting back on their shelves the books that no hands but ours had touched since Astrid went away. Daphne didn't have to tell me that she wished for these last few minutes to be alone.

I was as low in spirit myself, as if I had wounded something which I loved. The feet of the morning were beautiful upon the mountains, but the tidings of the day depressed me. I would have just one more sweeping view of the scene, then shut my eyes and go. Out to the end of the Philosopher's Walk I went to look down upon the roofs of Santa Barbara. Returning, I went to the end of the Poet's Walk. Then back and down to the lower garden I went to

the end of the Lover's Walk, to the little eucalyptus tree, to that one which was still alive of those that Astrid had planted.

Alas! it too was stricken. I touched it tenderly, glad now that I had plucked one of its precious leaves, while that leaf was still green and fragrant, and sent it to Astrid. I would take one now for myself, that the odor of her presence might go back with us to Hingham. And as I turned beneath the drooping live-oaks there she stood in the walk before me, for I am almost sure that I saw her, a faint, girlish figure within the deep shadows of the trees, as sad as she was lovely, an exile forever in Europe, forever returning to her Casa Loma home.

And we were returning to our Mullein Hill home, and the chores. This living in a Spanish castle was something to be dreamed, not realized. For some reason such castles do not seem to be adapted to literary work. I had not so much as begun my great book at Casa Loma. I would wait now until I reached Hingham.

I spoke in Pasadena that night, though not very well, Daphne said, for I overran the hour — a congenital weakness of all who are born to speak in public, I tell her, and not on this occasion caused, as she implied, by the journey which lay before me on the morrow. I was excited, possibly, for it did seem good to me, I will confess, to wrestle with a living crowd again after so many months alone with my unresponsive pen. How easy it is to talk!

Out of Pasadena Daphne steered me for Mint Cañon and Mohave with only the milkmen to see us start. Once more we were heading for the children. It is a serious thing to have children in so remote a place as Deep Springs Valley.

We found them the next day in their desert fastness, fearful of our asking them to motor back with us to Hingham. Their school was about over. The back seat in the big car was empty. I should like to have them help me drive. And what fun it would be to travel with them up hill and down dale this wide, wonderful land across!

But they had promised to remain on the ranch again this summer and look after the dairy herd, each lad taking the herd for half of the vacation, the other half to be spent with pack-horse and a boy companion in the High Sierras. No, they really must stay, out of loyalty to the school, and care for the cows.

We let them stay. We had driven out to the Pacific alone. We could drive back to the Atlantic alone. We hadn't always had these children. We could not expect to keep them with us always. We had pushed them out of the home nest. Could we ever push them into that nest again? No, they had flown, and were building trial nests for themselves — in the meadows of the Yosemite, and among the tops of the tall sequoias, for this summer. A motor car is a marvelous thing. But a pack-horse, and a tent in the High Sierras — I had rather have such a horse than Pegasus!

They wept, as they clung to the running-boards down the line of willows through their alfalfa fields to the gate and the Midland Trail. Here they dropped off, tearful, but resolute, and stood watching us shrink into the sage and fade away as dust on the plain toward Gilbert Pass and Goldfield, where we pitched that night.

We made Laramie on time; came into Grand Rapids, Michigan, on time; and reached Greenfield, Massachusetts, a full hour ahead of lecture-time. Daphne said I had driven

rather well for one who had driven from Santa Barbara alone.

Before we came to Greenfield we ran into a crackling thunder-shower, starting over the mountain on the Mohawk Trail amid the cannonading of the hills. But at the hairpin curve on the grade the clouds suddenly dissolved, the thunder scattered, and through the shifting mists and whisps of laughing rain ran the bright laughter of the evening sun. We halted to look and wonder — at the rainbow above the Berkshires, at the dripping green and gold upon the mountains, at the roofs and windows below us softly lighted with the sunset, and at ourselves, held in the curve of the highroad as in a trance. Had we not seen the Santa Ynez Range around Casa Loma, we might never have known how unspeakably beautiful were the Berkshires. And how very close to home!

Daphne imagined that she was being perfectly composed on our run from Greenfield the next day. I know that I maintained a perfect outward calm. From Wellesley on, however, our conversation lagged, Daphne making no effort to keep it going. We passed through Weymouth, crossed the Hingham line, and had mounted the gentle rise beyond the granite quarries when I heard her breathe,

'There's the red roof! The house still stands, thank God!'

It did still stand, thank God. And beside the house on the crest of the hill stood a boy waving his arms wildly as we rounded the curve, and whooping like a son of Massasoit. And in front of him was Jersey, dear old dog, barking wildly! And Tan, the yellow cat, not barking, nor waving his arms, but just sitting on the greensward like a kitten of the Sphinx. And yonder were the bees. And a

garden planted, as I lived! But, Heavens, it needed hoeing! And the bees needed unpacking. And a million things needed doing. And I needed a million hands for their doing, and a million mouths to taste the sweets of all the doing.

'I think,' said Daphne, as we paused for a bit of rest in the evening, 'that you had better order next winter's coal the first thing in the morning. The papers say the price is about to advance.'

'I have already done it, Daphne —' and I paused. 'I ordered twelve tons this afternoon.' But Daphne made no comment. 'With what we have left over in the cellar,' I concluded, 'twelve tons ought to carry us comfortably over the coming winter.'

THE END OF THE BETTER COUNTRY

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